

*IMOLA KATALIN NAGY*



*AN INTRODUCTION  
TO LEXICAL SEMANTICS  
FOR STUDENTS  
OF TRANSLATION STUDIES*

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SEMANTICS FOR STUDENTS  
OF TRANSLATION STUDIES*



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## PREFACE

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The volume entitled *An introduction to lexical semantics for students of translation studies* aims to help students and translators understand the role and importance of semantics within the wider system of linguistics and to help them fully meet the requirements of the programme in the subject. The book is intended for English-language students taking the course of contemporary English language. However, *An introduction to lexical semantics for students of translation studies* may also be of interest to those who would like to gain some information about the resources of the Modern English lexicon and about the complex nature of meaning.

A good command of English presupposes some knowledge of the aspects regarding the inner mechanism which makes the language system work. We aim to develop a more conscious approach to the resources of the languages we speak and we translate from/to, and a fairly good understanding of the way languages organize and express meanings. What is the meaning that is organized and expressed by languages? Are there different types of meaning? Which are the rules governing the changes of meaning that words undergo over time? Do different languages structure and express meaning in different ways? These are just a few questions that we are trying to answer.

We wish to discuss issues connected with the basic concepts in semantics (*sign and signification, reference and referent, linguistic competence vs. semantic competence, etc.*). We start from the premise that semantics basically means *knowledge of meanings* (from the point of view of the individual who speaks), on the one hand, but it also means *description of meanings* (from a linguist's point of view), on the other hand. We deal with aspects regarding the history of semantics and we attempt to focus on defining semantics and defining meaning. We approach the issue of meaning along three important pathways, i.e. focusing on semantic features (considering words as containers of certain semantic features, i.e. *semantic feature analysis*); focusing on the semantic roles they fulfil (*semantic roles*); focusing on the relationship with other words (*lexical relations or semantic relations*). After presenting the advantages and disadvantages of componential analysis or semantic feature analysis, we describe the most important semantic roles linguistic units may fulfil, and we dedicate a chapter to the presentation of semantic relations. From among paradigmatic relations, we focus on semantic equivalence and synonymy, semantic contrast and antonymy, hyponymy, homonymy, and polysemy. We also present the most basic syntagmatic relations, i.e. collocations and prototypes. Another chapter deals with different types of meaning shifts (borrowing words; word formation and changes of meaning, i.e. metaphors, metonymy, restriction of meaning,

specialization of meaning, extension of meaning, generalization of meaning, degradation of meaning, and elevation, or amelioration of meaning).

We take a look at the main theories of meaning that operate today in semantic studies and we include the most relevant taxonomies related to types of meaning (conceptual vs. associative meanings), mentioning aspects regarding levels of meaning (sound symbolism, morpheme meaning, word meaning, sentence meaning). We also include a chapter dedicated to the problem of the relationship between semantics and translation studies.

This volume is divided into the following chapters: *Introduction*, *Basic concepts in semantics*, *History of semantics*, *Defining semantics*, *Defining meaning*, *Approaches to meaning*, *Semantic relations*, *Semantic roles*, *Theories of meaning*, *Types of meaning*, *Changes of meaning*, *Semantics and translation*.

Our aim is to make our students more aware of the deep and sophisticated relationship between language usage and other dimensions of human experience, as we ultimately intend to make students understand the complex relationship between knowledge (of a language) and experience (of communication). Semantics is the study of meaning, and meaning is central to the study and understanding of human communication. All these are intricately connected with the way in which we classify and convey our experience of the world through language, with the ways in which we organize our knowledge of the world. The volume entitled *An introduction to lexical semantics for students of translation studies* intends to make students understand how to approach semantics, how to understand and how to translate all the layers and facets of what we call *meaning*.

## INTRODUCTION

The most important question of linguistic studies refers to what language is. Language can be defined as a systematic means of communication, meant to communicate ideas, feelings by using conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, and marks that carry meaning. Language has a modular structure (like boxes): each module is responsible for a particular aspect of language usage and comprehension: phonetics and phonology – grammar (morphology and syntax) – semantics. Semantics is the study of meaning in language. It is concerned with what language means. This is not the same as what people mean by the language they use, how they actualize its meaning potential as a communicative resource. This is the concern of pragmatics (Widdowson 1996: 61).

Semantics, as the study of linguistic meaning, deals with issues of what sentences and other linguistic objects express, but not with their syntactic arrangements or pronunciation. The basic question of semantics is what meaning is and its objective is to define, explain, and describe the process of signification. “Semantics, the study of word meaning and sentence meaning, abstracted away from contexts of use, is a descriptive subject. It is an attempt to describe and understand the nature of the knowledge about meaning in their language that people have from knowing the language” (Griffiths 2006: 15). However, cognitive linguistics tends to disclaim this difference between pragmatics and semantics.

The history of semantics is a peculiarly complex one because so many fields of study are involved, among them the study of the meaning relationships between words in a particular language. Yet, semantics is not only a matter of assigning meaning to individual units, whether these be morphemes or words, but is also concerned with the relationships between them, how they act upon each other, how they fuse and combine in different ways. “Semantics is the complex interplay of morphology, lexis, and syntax. Complex though it is, however, it does not account for all aspects of meaning. We still have pragmatics to consider” (Widdowson 1996: 61).

There have been numerous theories and (mis)conceptions about the nature of meaning. One of the false ideas was the one that identified words and things, and attempted to define meaning in terms of behavioural stimulus and response. Philosophy and logic were the two main sciences which influenced the development of semantics. Even ancient philosophers were preoccupied with the problem of meaning. Some said that the names of things were conditioned by the natural properties of the things themselves. Others considered that names were

given arbitrarily and they were pure conventions. Aristotle approached meaning as a logician: he was interested in what is there to know, how people know it, and how they express what they know in language. In the field of semantics, he identified a level of language analysis: the lexical level, which was supposed to study the meaning of words.

A unique definition of meaning proves to be too wide and too narrow at the same time. As far as semantic theory is concerned, it explains the way in which the meaning of a sentence of specified structure is derivable from the fully specified meanings of its parts (Zdrengeha 1977: 4). Therefore, we can refer to the semantics of lexical units, which is completed by the semantics of syntactic units.

Semantics is the study of meaning. The term *semantics* originates from the Greek word *sēmantiká*, neuter plural of *sēmantikós*, derived from the Greek word *sēma* meaning *sign*, or, as Nick Riemer puts it, “*semantics* comes from the ancient Greek word *semantikos*, an adjective meaning ‘relating to signs’, based on the noun *sēmeion* ‘sign’” (Riemer 2010: 4). Although the study of meaning is extremely old, the name *semantics* was only coined in the late nineteenth century by French linguist Michel Bréal. “Like many other names of branches of linguistics, the word *semantics* reflects the origins of the Western tradition of linguistic analysis in the writings of Greek thinkers from the fifth century BC onwards”, adds Riemer (2010: 4).

*Semantics* focuses on the relationship that exists between *signifiers* (such as words, phrases, signs, and symbols) and what they stand for (their *denotata*, or the *signified*). Another concern of semantic studies is the problem of semantic change, i.e. change of meaning.

There are basically three main semantic problems in the centre of semantic studies and researches:

- a psychological problem: why and how people communicate, what a sign is, what the psychic mechanisms of communication are;
- a logical problem: the relationships between signs and reality;
- a linguistic problem: what a word is, the relations between the form and the sense or meaning of a word, the relationships between words.

As David Crystal puts it, out of these, the most important one is the linguistic approach, which “aims to study the properties of meaning in a systematic and objective way, with reference to as wide a range of utterances and languages as possible” (Crystal 1996: 100).

## Basic concepts in semantics

As we have seen so far, there is a set of basic concepts that can be found at work in semantics. We cannot but attempt to define each one to offer a comprehensive view of semantics.

## Sign and signification

In order to communicate in a language, people need to know the vocabulary and the ways to use it productively and receptively. But is this enough? Language itself can be regarded as “an institution, as a complex form of human behaviour governed by signs. This understanding of language opens the way for a new, *intentional* theory of meaning. Meaning is achieved therefore either by *convention* or by *intention*.”<sup>1</sup>

Language is not the only way in which we can communicate meaning. Linguistic signs are not the only kind of signs that surround us and that we use. The study of meaning in general is done by *semiotics*. Semiotics studies how signs mean; the mechanisms along which we can make one thing stand for another (a signifier stands for a signified). For instance, in Western cultures, black clothes usually indicate mourning, whereas the colour of mourning in some Eastern cultures is white. People visiting the seaside know that a red flag means that it is dangerous to swim. All these signs are culturally based.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce devoted a life-time work to the study of signs, and he set up semiotics as a science. Peirce distinguished three main types of signs according to the nature of the relationship between the two inseparable aspects of a sign: the *signans* (the material support of the sign) and the *signatum* (the thing signified).<sup>2</sup> Today, semioticians still find it useful to make a three-way distinction, first established by C. S. Peirce; and semiotics is, in this view, a science about signs.

**1. Icon:** a relation of similarity between the sign and what it represents; for example, a portrait, bathroom signs, etc. (they are not arbitrary, partly conventional).

*Icons* (are signs) in which the relationship between the signans and the signatum is one of the similarity. The signans of an iconic type of sign resembles in shape its signatum. Drawings, photographs, etc. are examples of iconic signs. Yet, physical similarity does not imply true copying or reflection of the signatum by the signans. Peirce distinguished two subclasses of icons-images and diagrams. In the case of the latter, it is obvious that the “similarity” is hardly “physical” at all. In a diagram of the rate of population or industrial production growth, for instance, convention plays a very important part.<sup>3</sup>

Iconic is “a mode in which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified (recognizably looking, sounding, feeling, tasting or smelling like it) – being similar in possessing some of its qualities: e.g. a portrait, a cartoon, a

1 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

2 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

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scale-model, onomatopoeia, metaphors, ‘realistic’ sounds in ‘programme music’, sound effects in radio drama, a dubbed film soundtrack, imitative gestures.”<sup>4</sup>

**2. Index:** indexical signs refer to a cause–effect relationship, contiguity in space or time, for example, smoke and fire, yawning and boredom, vultures circling overhead a dead animal (they are neither arbitrary nor conventional). “Indexes (are signs) in which the relationship between the signans and the signatum is the result of a constant association based on physical contiguity, not on similarity. The signans does not resemble the signatum to indicate it. Thus, smoke is an index for fire, gathering clouds indicate a coming rain, high temperature is an index for illness, footprints are indexes for the presence of animals, etc.”<sup>5</sup>

*Indexical* is “a mode in which the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some way (physically or causally) to the signified – this link can be observed or inferred: e.g. natural signs (smoke, thunder, footprints, echoes, non-synthetic odours and flavours), medical symptoms (pain, a rash, pulse-rate), measuring instruments (weathercock, thermometer, clock, spirit-level), ‘signals’ (a knock on a door, a phone ringing), pointers (a pointing ‘index’ finger, a directional signpost), recordings (a photograph, a film, video or television shot, an audio-record).”<sup>6</sup>

**3. Symbol:** an arbitrary, conventional relationship between sign and meaning; for example, red flag and danger. Among symbols Filip<sup>7</sup> includes natural language, formal languages such as algebraic languages, programming languages, first-order language, etc. (arbitrary and conventional). “Symbols (are signs) in which the relationship between the signans and the signatum is entirely conventional. There is no similarity or physical contiguity between the two. The signans and signatum are bound by convention; their relationship is an arbitrary one. Language signs are essentially symbolic in nature. Ferdinand de Saussure clearly specified absolute arbitrariness as ‘the proper condition of the verbal sign.’”<sup>8</sup>

*Symbolic* is “a mode in which the signifier does not resemble the signified but which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional – so that the relationship must be learnt: e.g. language in general (plus specific languages, alphabetical letters, punctuation marks, words, phrases and sentences), numbers, Morse code, traffic lights, national flags.”<sup>9</sup>

4 Florian Haas, *Introduction to linguistics – basic questions, concepts and methods*; downloaded from: [http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207\\_SemI.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207_SemI.pdf) and [userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208\\_SemII.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208_SemII.pdf)

5 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

6 Florian Haas, *Introduction to linguistics – basic questions, concepts and methods*. Downloaded from: [http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207\\_SemI.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207_SemI.pdf) and [userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208\\_SemII.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208_SemII.pdf).

7 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf), 11–12.

8 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc).

9 Florian Haas, *Introduction to linguistics – basic questions, concepts and methods*. Down-

Approaching things from a simpler, more didactic perspective, we may simplify things a bit and say that there are two basic types of signs:

- *natural signs*, based on the relations between natural phenomena. Natural signs copy the reality they represent, a sketch of a room, a person's portrait, and such signs are called *icons*. Another type of natural signs bears a suggestive relationship to phenomena that they can be associated with (*cloud/rain*). These are called *indices*.

- *artificial signs*, created or fabricated by people. This category of artificial or conventional signs can be subdivided into:

- artificial signs which serve to represent reality (a photo, a plan, a drawing, a logo);

- artificial signs which help people communicate: language, signals, polite signs.

Ferdinand de Saussure suggested that linguistics should be regarded as just one branch of a more general science of sign systems, which he called *semiology*. “The act of semiosis may be both *motivated* and *conventional*. If semiosis is motivated, then motivation is achieved either by contiguity or by similarity.”<sup>10</sup>

Linguistic signs have a representational or symbolic function that relies in a crucial way on the intentions of language users to use them to communicate a certain meaning. In addition, meaning is more than a matter of intentions on the part of individual language users; it is also a matter of convention.

The property of ‘aboutness’ of linguistic signs (= symbols) is truly unique to linguistic signs that is missing from other signs. For example, a rabbit's tracks in the snow mean that the rabbit has recently passed by. Or, when we see smoke, we assume that it means there is also fire somewhere. A sign like this call is called an index. Unlike linguistic signs, or symbols, they are not arbitrary because there is a necessary causal connection between the sign and what it means.

Consequently, they are also not conventional, what such signs mean is not established by a convention, by some public collective agreement. And such signs like a rabbit's tracks are not produced with an intention to communicate something to you, they cannot be intentionally used to talk about or to refer to rabbits in general, all those rabbits that existed, exist and will exist.

There are also signs like the bathroom signs: typically, a stick figure with a skirt and a stick figure without a skirt. Such signs are not arbitrary because they iconically reflect what they are supposed to signify. We call them icons. Icons are partly conventional. Traffic signs are another good example. Their shape is clearly iconically related to their meanings, but

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we need to learn the conventional connection between the sign and its meaning in many instances.<sup>11</sup>

Signification is the process through which we attribute meaning to signs.

The signification is the process which associates an object, a being, a notion, an event to a sign capable to recall them. The sign is therefore a stimulus. What we call experience or knowledge is nothing else but the signification of reality. It implies the universality of the problem of signification. We live among signs and a general science of signification comprises an assembly of human knowledge and activities (Zdrengeha 1977: 8).

## Sense, denotation, and reference

An important and useful distinction in semantics is to define the *sense* and *reference* of linguistic expressions.

Sense and reference are crucial components, as they form part of the foundation of every facet of study within semantics. Sense refers to the central meaning of a linguistic form and how it relates to other expressions within the language system. Reference can be defined as characterising the relationships between language and the world, in particular, specific entities that are being focused upon. A classic example to help illustrate the distinction between the two terms is consideration of the noun phrases ‘the morning star’ and ‘the evening star’ ... Both can be defined as having the same reference – they both refer to the planet Venus –, but they clearly have different senses (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 10).

Some writers use the term *reference* and *denotation* interchangeably. An expression’s denotation is the class of possible objects, situations, etc. to which the word can refer. The term *reference*, by contrast, has two uses:

- as the name of the act by which a speaker refers to a referent;
- as a synonym of *referent*, i.e. as the term for the object(s) to which an expression refers on a particular instance of use.

*Reference* sometimes means the act of referring, and sometimes means a referent (Riemer 2010: 19).

Talking of reference means “dealing with relationships between language and the world; by means of reference a speaker indicates which things (including persons) are being talked about. Example ‘My son is in the beech tree’” (Hurford et alii 2007: 26).

Many expressions can have variable reference (e.g. *Left-handed people are usually talented in arts and crafts* → there are many left-handed people in the world).

<sup>11</sup> Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 11–12.

There are cases of expressions which in normal everyday conversation never refer to different things, i.e. which in most everyday situations that one can envisage have constant reference: the physical object or person in the real world (*This book is really good* = this concrete book that I am holding in my hand).<sup>12</sup>

## Sense

The sense of an expression is its place in a system of semantic relationships with other expressions in the language (Hurford et alii 2007: 29). Sense of an expression is not a thing at all but an abstraction. Every expression that has meaning has sense, but not every expression has reference.<sup>13</sup>

Sense is more difficult to define than reference as it does not refer to a particular person or thing – it is a much more abstract concept. We all know what the sense of *Batman*, *Catwoman*, *Tooth Fairy*, *Superman*, *Loch Ness Monster*, *Bigfoot*, etc. is, still, knowing that there are no entities in the real world named Batman, Catwoman, Tooth Fairy, Superman, Loch Ness Monster, or Bigfoot. The idea mentioned above is reinforced by Mullany–Stockwell:

The best way to consider the sense of a linguistic form, and thus define its central meaning, is to compare it with other entities. For example, if we compare a dog to a cat or a giraffe, we get a better understanding of the semantic features of the lexical term ‘dog’. By making such comparisons we are defining the senses of the linguistic form ‘dog’. It is important to remember that all expressions which have meaning can be defined as having sense, but not all expressions of meaning will have reference (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 10).

The sense of an expression is its indispensable hard core of meaning.

The sense of an expression can be thought of as the sum of its sense properties and sense relations with other expressions. (1) The meaning of *cat* includes that of *animal*. (2) The meaning of *adult* excludes the meaning of *child*. (3) The meaning of *kill* is related to that of *dead* in such a way that anything killed is necessarily dead.

The kind of meaning we are talking about here is obviously the kind associated with words and sentences by the language system, and not the speaker meaning specifically associated with utterances made by speakers on particular occasions. This kind of meaning we call sense (Hurford et alii 2007: 95).

12 Diana Santos, *Semantics and machine translation*. Downloaded from: [www.linguateca.pt/Diana/.../SantosAPL92.pdf](http://www.linguateca.pt/Diana/.../SantosAPL92.pdf).

13 Diana Santos, *Semantics and machine translation*. Downloaded from: [www.linguateca.pt/Diana/.../SantosAPL92.pdf](http://www.linguateca.pt/Diana/.../SantosAPL92.pdf).

We can talk about the sense not only of words but also of longer expressions (phrases and sentences). The sense of a word or of an expression is its place in a system of semantic relationships with other expressions in the language. The notions of sense and reference are central to the study of meaning.

The idea of reference is relatively solid and easy to understand. The idea of sense is more elusive: it's a bit like electricity, which we all know how to use (and even talk about), in various ways, without ever being sure what exactly it is. Even semanticists aren't sure exactly what sense is, but you'll find that your grasp of it and your appreciation of the usefulness of the concept will grow as you study more. (The importance of the sense/reference distinction was most influentially demonstrated by the German philosopher Gottlob Frege) (Hurford et alii 2007: 34).

On the relationship between sense and reference, Hurford et alii note that the referent of an expression is often a thing or a person in the world, whereas the sense of an expression is not a thing at all.

In fact, it is difficult to say what sort of entity the sense of an expression is. Intuitively, it is sometimes useful to think of sense as that part of the meaning of an expression that is left over when reference is factored out. It is much easier to say whether or not two expressions have the same sense. (Like being able to say that two people are in the same place without being able to say where they are.) The sense of an expression is an abstraction, but it is helpful to note that it is an abstraction that can be entertained in the mind of a language user. When a person understands fully what is said to him, it is reasonable to say that he grasps the sense of the expressions he hears (Hurford et alii 2007: 30).

## Referent

John Lyons (1977) introduced another term, *referent*, which designates the objects named or signified by words. The reference is the relationship associating the word and its referent. As far as the linguistic sign in semantics is concerned, we have to say that no perfect definition of meaning can be given. Not all the words have a referent in the real world (*ghost*) and still have meaning, and there are words with an identical reference but with clearly different meaning (*Norma Jean Baker* and *Marilyn Monroe*). Meaning cannot be identified with the object designed by the sign. Meaning cannot be identified with the concept or notion either. Referent is the person, phenomenon, or the object to which the linguistic sign, the lexeme refers to. Referent of an expression is a thing or a person in the world.

The difference between meaning and referent i.e. from the thing denoted by the linguistic sign meaning is linguistic, whereas the denoted object or the referent is beyond the scope of language.

We can denote one and the same object by more than one word of a different meaning. For instance, in a speech situation an apple can be denoted by the words apple, fruit, something, this, etc. as all of these words may have the same referent. Meaning cannot be equated with the actual properties of the referent, e.g. the meaning of the word water cannot be regarded as identical with its chemical formula  $H_2O$  as water means essentially the same to all English speakers including those who have no idea of its chemical composition. Last but not least, there are words that have distinct meaning but do not refer to any existing thing, e.g. angel or phoenix. Such words have meaning which is understood by the speaker-hearer, but the objects they denote do not exist (Ginzburg et alii 1979. 15–16).

Two different expressions can have the same referent: e.g. the aforementioned Morning Star and Evening Star (both refer to the planet Venus). There are several different aspects of the meaning of a lexeme:

its referent on any one occasion of use, its denotation, which is the set of all its referents, and its *sense*, or the abstract, general meaning which can be translated from one language to another, paraphrased, or defined in a dictionary. Connotation names those aspects of meaning which do not affect a word's sense, reference or denotation, but which have to do with secondary factors such as its emotional force, its level of formality, its character as a euphemism, etc. (Riemer 2010: 31).

## Referring expression

A key concept when defining reference is the term *referring expression*, denoting a word or a phrase that specifically defines a particular entity in the world. Noun phrases are classic examples of referring expressions.

Reference is context-dependent, and ascertaining the meaning of particular referents depends entirely upon who is speaking, whom they are speaking with and in what setting the interaction is taking place.

Some utterances may be referring expressions in one context but not in another.

For example, indefinite noun phrases need to be viewed in context – on some occasions they will be referring expressions, on other occasions that will not fulfill this function.

Compare the utterance 'A woman was just staring at you' with 'This apartment needs a woman's touch'. In the former example, 'a woman' is a referring expression, but in the latter example it has indefinite reference: it does not refer to one particular woman and so it is not operating as a referring expression in quite the same way (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 11).

A referring expression is any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or someone (or a clearly delimited collection of things or people), i.e. used with a particular referent in mind.

“Example: The name *Fred* in an utterance such as ‘Fred hit me’, where the speaker has a particular person in mind when he says ‘Fred’, is a referring expression.

*Fred* in ‘There’s no Fred at this address’ is not a referring expression, because in this case a speaker would not have a particular person in mind in uttering the word (Hurford et alii 2007: 37).

Thus, meaning is “a certain reflection in our mind of objects, phenomena or relations that makes part of the linguistic sign – its so-called inner facet, whereas the sound-form functions as its outer facet”.<sup>14</sup>

Grammatical meaning is defined as “the expression in speech of relationships between words. The grammatical meaning is more abstract and more generalised than the lexical meaning. It is recurrent in identical sets of individual forms of different words as the meaning of plurality in the following words *students*, *windows*, *compositions*”.<sup>15</sup>

Lexical meaning is the realization of concept or emotion by means of a definite language system.

## Denotation

The conceptual content of a word is expressed in its denotative meaning. “To denote is to serve as a linguistic expression for a concept or as a name for an individual object. It is the denotational meaning that makes communication possible.”<sup>16</sup> A denotation identifies the central aspect of word meaning, which everybody generally agrees about (Kreidler 1998: 45). We need to draw a distinction between *reference* and *denotation*.

Reference is the relation between a language expression such as *this door*, *both doors*, *the dog*, *another dog* and whatever the expression pertains to in a particular situation of language use, including what a speaker may imagine. Denotation is the potential of a word like *door* or *dog* to enter into such language expressions. Reference is the way speakers and hearers use an expression successfully; denotation is the knowledge they have that makes their use successful (Kreidler 1998: 43).

*Violin* and *that fiddle* can have the same referent – can refer to the same object on a particular occasion –, but they do not have the same meaning. They

14 Lectures on English lexicology, 2010, Lectures.on.Le\_icology1.pdf.

15 Lectures on English lexicology, 2010, Lectures.on.Le\_icology1.pdf.

16 Lectures on English lexicology, 2010, Lectures.on.Le\_icology1.pdf.

differ in connotation: *violin* is the usual term, the stylistically neutral one; *fiddle* is used for humour or to express affection or lack of esteem.

## Connotation

Connotation is “the pragmatic communicative value the word receives depending on where, when, how, by whom, for what purpose and in what contexts it may be used. There are four main types of connotations: stylistic, emotional, evaluative and expressive or intensifying.”<sup>17</sup> “Connotation refers to the personal aspect of meaning, the emotional associations that the word arouses. Connotations vary according to the experience of individuals but, because people do have common experiences, some words have shared connotations” (Kreidler 1998: 45).

Stylistic connotation is what the word conveys about the speaker’s attitude to the social circumstances and the appropriate functional style (*slay* vs. *kill*), evaluative connotation may show approval or disapproval, attitude towards the object spoken of (*clique* vs. *group*), emotional connotation conveys the speaker’s emotions (*mummy* vs. *mother*), the degree of intensity (*adore* vs. *love*) is conveyed by expressive or intensifying connotation. ... Emotional connotation comes into being on the basis of denotative meaning but in the course of time may substitute it by other types of connotation with general emphasis, evaluation and colloquial stylistic overtone. E.g. *terrific* which originally meant ‘frightening’ is now a colloquialism meaning ‘very, very good’ or ‘very great’: *terrific beauty*, *terrific pleasure*.<sup>18</sup>

Connotations are important not only in everyday, interpersonal communication but also in a large variety of discourses, such as the language of advertising: “companies with products to sell make great expenditures of time, talent and money to select brand names which will project the preferred ‘image’ for cars, cosmetics, detergents, but names are often chosen for their connotation rather than for what they denote” (Kreidler 1998: 47).

17 Lectures on English lexicology, 2010, Lectures.on.Le\_icology1.pdf.

18 Lectures on English lexicology, 2010, Lectures.on.Le\_icology1.pdf.



## Compositionality and productivity

The signs of human communication are rather conventional, meaning and sense result from the agreement between users. Language is a collection of conventional symbols. What is more, language has more expressive power than any other sign system as its building blocks can be combined and recombined all over again, producing an endless number of new and meaningful messages. This capacity of immingling sentence components in various ways is called *compositionality*, which is one of the basic features of all languages. Meaning is, on the one hand, compositional, “which means that the meanings of sentences are made up, or composed, of the meanings of their constituent lexemes” (Riemer 2010: 31).

On the other hand, another feature of meaning is *productivity*.

All human languages have the property of productivity. This is simply the fact that the vocabulary of any given language can be used to construct a theoretically infinite number of sentences (not all of which will be meaningful), by varying the ways in which the words are combined. For example, given the words *the, a, has, eaten, seen, passing, contemporary, novelist* and *buffalo*, the following figure among the large number of meaningful sentences that can be constructed:

*The novelist has seen the buffalo.*

*A novelist has eaten the buffalo.*

*A contemporary novelist has seen a buffalo.*

*The novelist has seen a passing buffalo.*

*A buffalo has eaten a passing contemporary novelist* (Riemer 2010: 20–21).

## Code

Another concept that has to be defined is *code* ( $\rightarrow$  any language system). Code enciphers the message transmitted by the addresser to the addressee. We should make the difference between artificial codes/languages that are closed systems of elements used to produce meaningful messages (Morse code, computer language) and natural languages which have evolved in their own natural way over centuries (within a social environment and being used and naturally learned by wide communities of speakers). Within natural languages, there are varieties called *dialects* (which is not the case of artificial codes). The total number of words in a language forms the *lexicon* or the vocabulary of the language.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913, author of *Course in general linguistics*) has created a *theory of the linguistic sign*, which includes a *schema of linguistic communication*. According to Saussure, communication essentially implies a *speaker* and an *addressee*, a thing that the speaker wants to communicate to

the addressee and a set of linguistic signs by means of which he communicates. Thus, we have this bipolar association with two terms: the *signifier* and the *signified* (concept), and the two phases of communication: the evocation of the name by the object, on the one hand, and the evocation of the object by the name, on the other hand.

Although Saussure in his posthumously published work of 1916 explicitly deals with the concrete process of communication, as an exchange between a speaker and a hearer, he later abstracts from this process and concentrates on the non-individual, social, abstract language system which he called *langue*.

For him the linguistic sign itself has two sides: a given notion (“concept”) that is associated in the brain with a certain phonic image (“image acoustique”). Both are mutually conditioning and evoke, or call each other up, mutually. ...

Saussure stresses repeatedly that the linguistic sign is a mental unit (“une entité psychique à deux faces”), and does not link a thing and a name, but a concept and a phonic image. This image is for him nothing material, physical, but a mental impression of a sound. The connection of *concept* and *image acoustique*, of concept and sound picture, for Saussure constitutes the *signe linguistique*, the linguistic sign. The notions “concept” and “image acoustique” are later replaced by him by the terms *signifié* and *signifiant*, which have since become internationally accepted technical terms, due to their precision and unambiguousness.

It must be pointed out here that *signe*, *signifié* and *signifiant* are all considered as discrete entities by Saussure (Lipka 1992: 41).

Saussure’s theory states that language is a system of signs and linguistics is integrated within the larger science of signs, i.e. *semiotics*. The sign is the basic entity of language, built up of the signifier (acoustic image) and the signified (concept). The two imply each other, they cannot exist without each other (a concept cannot be a fact of language if it does not have an acoustic image and an acoustic image is not a fact of language if it is not associated with a concept). Therefore, signs are means of communication that carry information through the communication channel. Signs refer to entities in the outside world, but they can also refer to abstract or generic ideas. Signs have the capacity of representing something, thus they can be considered symbols. As Vizental (2008) puts it, relying on Saussure, the association of the signifier (sound pattern) and the signified (the reality the sound pattern refers to) make up the linguistic sign. One of the basic properties of linguistic signs is *arbitrariness* (random): signs in a language are the result of convention, as they are used by a community and are part of its traditions. *Immutability* is one of the contradictory processes linguistic signs can undergo. Signs tend to be fixed and constant or unchanged over long periods of time. Nevertheless, another phenomenon might occur, i.e. *mutability*,

the property of the sign to change. Signs as well as meanings do change over time; still, the signifier and the signified do not change in correlation (one can be more static than the other).

Adriana Vizental resumes Saussure's *drainpipe view* on human communication in the following way:

Saussure described linguistic exchanges as a process of encoding and decoding that goes on between two or more individuals who know the code, i.e. share the same language. The process starts in the mind of the speaker (the producer/the sender of the message), who puts his thoughts (meanings) into words, organizes them into structures according to the rules of the language, and gives them a physical (phonetic) form. The message thus built up is sent towards the listener (the receiver of the message) in the form of a continuous succession of sound waves. In his turn, the receiver, who knows the code, decodes the message by following the same route, but in the opposite direction: he receives the message in its phonetic form, analyzes its structures, and gets to the meaning the sender wanted to convey (Vizental 2006: 8).

Still, what is meaning and what is the meaning of *to mean*? C. K. Ogden and I. Richards published in 1923 on the subject of semantic studies: *The meaning of meaning*. In here, the authors identified 16 different meanings of the words *mean/meaning*, among which:

- *John means to write.* (= *Intends*)
- *A green light means go.* (= *Indicates*)
- *Health means everything.* (= *Has importance*)
- *His look was full of meaning.* (= *Special import*)
- *What is the meaning of life?* (= *Point, purpose*)
- *What does capitalist mean to you?* (= *Convey*)
- *What does cornea mean?* (= *Refer to in the world*) (Crystal 1996: 100).

The focus of linguistic semantics is close to the last sense cited by Crystal, i.e. *refer to in the world*. Semantics essentially studies the way in which words and sentences convey meaning in everyday situations of speech/writing.

Other authors come up with other examples to illustrate the meaning of *to mean*.

English uses the verb *to mean* to refer to a relationship involving at least one of three different types of thing: language, the world (including people, objects, and everything outside of ourselves) and our own minds or intentions. Here are five typical examples of *mean* in English which exemplify some of these relationships:

- (5) *When I said 'Dublin has lots of attractions' I meant Dublin, Ireland, not Dublin, Virginia.*
- (6) *In Sydney, 'the bridge' means the Harbour Bridge.*
- (7) *'Stout' means 'short and fat'.*

(8) *By turning off the music I didn't mean that you should go.*

(9) *Trees mean water.*

Sentence (5) distinguishes two possible places that the speaker could have been referring to by the name 'Dublin', and specifies that only one of them was intended. This, then, is a three-way relation between a piece of language, a mind and the world: the world is represented by the two places called Dublin, language by the sentence 'Dublin has lots of attractions', and mind by the speaker's *intention* to refer to Dublin, Ireland. The second sentence is a relation between language and world, without any specific reference to people's intentions. It says that the expression 'the bridge' refers to one particular structure – the Sydney Harbour Bridge – rather than any of the other bridges in Sydney. Even though it is obviously only through the action of speakers' minds that *bridge* has this reference, there is no explicit mention of speakers' minds in (6). In (7), there is no explicit reference to either people's minds or to the world: the sentence reports an equivalence between two linguistic items, the word 'stout', according to (7), is simply equivalent in some way to the words 'short and fat'. Sentence (8) refers to a mind–world relation: it is thus like sentence (5), except that there is no language: the speaker denies that the action of turning the music off was the result of any *intention* for the guests to leave. Sentence (9) names a world–world relationship: the presence of one type of object in the world (trees) reveals the presence of another (water) (Riemer 2010: 7–8).

There is a whole array of dimensions when dealing with the content side of linguistic signs: semantic, logical, pragmatic, and structural. Zdrenghea refers to the following types of meaning:

- Denotative meaning (signification accounting for the relation between signs and their denotata);
- Significative meaning (sense accounting for the relationship between signs and significata);
- Pragmatic meaning (accounting for the relationship between sign and user, including connotative meaning as well);
- Structural meaning (accounting for the relations obtaining among the signs themselves) (Zdrenghea 1977: 20).

The formal study of semantics intersects with many other fields of inquiry, including lexicology, syntax, pragmatics, etymology, philosophy of language, and others. Further related fields include philology, communication, and semiotics. The formal study of semantics is therefore complex. Semantics contrasts with syntax, the study of the combinatorics of units of a language (without reference to their meaning), and pragmatics, the study of the relationships between the symbols of a language, their meaning, and the users of the language. In international scientific vocabulary, semantics is also called *semasiology*, or the study of significations. (As we have seen earlier, it was French linguist Michel

Breall who substituted in 1883 the word *semantics* to designate the science of significations and the rules that regulate change of meaning.)

James Hurford, Brendan Heasley, and Michael B. Smith in their volume *Semantics. A coursebook* deal with the most important issues related to semantics. “Semantics is the study of meaning in language” (Hurford 2007: 1). Speaker meaning is what a speaker means (i.e. intends to convey) when he uses a piece of language. Sentence meaning (or word meaning) is what a sentence (or word) means, i.e. what it counts as the equivalent of in the language concerned. The distinction is useful in analysing the various kinds of communication between people made possible by language (Hurford 2007: 3).

Semantics is an attempt to set up a theory of meaning (a theory is a precisely specified, coherent, and economical frame-work of interdependent statements and definitions, constructed so that as large a number as possible of particular basic facts can either be seen to follow from it or be describable in terms of it). Not only words have meaning but other linguistic units as well.

Semantics is concerned with the meanings of non-sentences, such as phrases and incomplete sentences, just as much as with whole sentences.

The meanings of whole sentences involve propositions; the notion of a proposition is central to semantics. What exactly a proposition is is much debated by semanticists. A *proposition* is that part of the meaning of the utterance of a declarative sentence which describes some state of affairs. *Sentence* is a grammatically complete string of words expressing a (partial) complete thought.

An *utterance* is any stretch of talk, by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that person. An utterance is the use by a particular speaker, on a particular occasion, of a piece of language, such as a sequence of sentences, or a single phrase, or even a single word (Hurford 2007:17).

## **Linguistic competence, semantic competence**

Another issue that should be clarified is the problem of linguistic competence i.e. the “ability to encode and decode linguistic messages thanks to his knowledge of the language... linguistic competence means, first of all, knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of the language” (Vizental 2006: 9). The vocabulary of a language has several components, spelling, pronunciation, grammatical category and structure, and meaning. Dictionaries usually list entries (words) by the following categories: word classes the specific word belongs to, pronunciation guide and meanings. “Meaning – the object study of semantics – is the most controversial aspect of communication, because it is extremely complex and variable” (Vizental 2006: 11). Based on Saussure’s theory,

the author defines language as a semiotic system, the signs of which have two ways of creating meaning: syntagmatic combination (the combinatory capacity of the signs, the way units are combined into superior units) and paradigmatic choice (the linguistic choice the speaker makes, the words, sounds chosen to convey meaning).

*Semantic competence* is an important component of the fluent speaker's linguistic competence; it refers to the knowledge of the meaning of words and the knowledge of encoding and decoding meanings.

In his work *Language* (London, 1933), Leonard Bloomfield defines meaning as the semantic load carried by any linguistic sign, a definition which is, in Vizental's view, rather vague, though quite succinct (Bloomfield apud Vizental 2006: 14). On the other hand, Leech (1990) thinks that it is more important to refer to and define semantic competence than meaning. Semantic competence means not only knowing the words and their meanings but also mastering and recognizing semantic relations, grammatical markers (of plurality, of preterity, of modality), and discourse markers. Semantic competence involves the following abilities:

- Knowledge of the meaning of lexical items: dictionary meanings, connotations, figurative usages;
- Recognizing and using relations of meaning between lexical items and constructs: synonymy, hyponymy, oppositions;
- Recognizing and using grammatical and discourse markers;
- Distinguishing meaningful sentences from semantically anomalous ones;
- Using the context to disambiguate semantically ambiguous sentences;
- Recognizing and interpreting figurative speech (Vizental 2006: 18).

## Lexeme, linguistic unit

The minimal unit of semantics is not the word but rather the *lexeme*, *linguistic item*, or *linguistic unit*.

The term *lexeme* is used to name the carrier of meaning, i.e. the basic underlying dictionary form of words, e.g. *go* for *go*, *goes*, *went* and *gone*. *Linguistic unit* is generally employed to refer to groups of words that have a unitary meaning, e.g. *to make up one's mind*, *to go crazy*. The term *linguistic item* can be used to refer either to an individual lexeme (e.g. *go*) or to a lexical unit (e.g. *to go crazy*), as they both function – semantically – as one item (Vizental 2006: 14).

The lexeme is the name of the abstract unit which links all the morphological variants of a word. Thus, we can say that *go*, *goes*, *went*, *have gone*, and *to go* all are instantiations of the lexeme *to go*.

Nevertheless, even the word *word* may be difficult to define with respect to meaning and semantic load.

Not all languages have a word corresponding to English ‘word’: Warlpiri makes no distinction between ‘word’, ‘utterance’, ‘language’ and ‘story’, all of which are translated by the noun *yimi*.

In Cup’ik (Yup’ik, Central Alaska), the word for ‘word’ also means ‘sayings, message’ and ‘Bible’ ... Dhegihan (Siouan, North America) has a single word, *íe*, referring to words, sentences and messages (Riemer 2010: 17).

In semantics, it is preferable to speak of units instead of words. Thus, we would categorize *walk*, *walks*, *walked*, and *walking* as different words. Yet, in point of their semantics, they are all variants of the same unit *walk*. Another example would be the idiom *kick the bucket* (to die). In this case, we deal with a single unit of meaning consisting of three words, so it would be highly inappropriate to talk about it as a word. In providing a semantic description of a language, we do not need to treat all the variant morphological forms of a single word separately. “Instead, we describe the meanings of a language’s lexemes, or the abstract units which unite all the morphological variants of a single word” (Riemer 2010: 31).

## HISTORY OF SEMANTICS

The history of semantics and its relationship with the development of other areas of knowledge can be traced back quite far. Aristotle is usually regarded as the forerunner of modern semantics. He was concerned with the same general areas that concern modern semanticists. Still, we must mention that there are areas of meaning studied by modern semanticists, which were not known to Aristotle and his fellow philosophers.

We must assume that our modern theories of meaning (to the extent that they agree with one another) are in some sense superior to Aristotle's, i.e. that in some ways Aristotle 'got it wrong', and we, with the benefit of more than 2,000 years' further thought, are more likely to have 'got it right'. Semantic theories are justified by reference to the actual semantic facts that they are meant to account for. As the subject has developed, new dimensions in the nature of meaning have begun to be described. And today's semanticists have at their disposal certain modern techniques (e.g. symbolic logic, new theories of grammar such as cognitive and generative grammar, and research in psychology and cognitive science, to name just a few) not available to the ancients. As far as we can tell, although individual languages have changed (Modern Greek is very different from Ancient Greek), the basic ways in which language is used to convey meaning have not changed at all (Hurford et alii 2007: 13).

### The Antiquity

Aristotle's works (*Organon*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*) represent a major contribution to the study of semantics.

His general approach to language was that of a logician, in the sense that he was interested in what there is to know how men know it, and how they express it in language. In the field of semantics proper, he identified a level of language analysis – the lexical one – the main purpose of which was to study the meaning of words either in isolation or in syntactic constructions. He deepened the discussion of the polysemy, antonymy, synonymy and homonymy and developed a full-fledged theory of metaphor.<sup>1</sup>

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1 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*



The idea is previously mentioned by Zdrengeha (1977: 1–2), who adds:

The contribution of stoic philosophy to semantics is related to their discussion of the nature of the linguistic sign. For them, just as for Ferdinand de Saussure, but twelve centuries before de Saussure, the linguistic sign – *semeion* – is an entity resulting from the relationship obtaining between the signifier – *semainon* – (the sound or graphical aspect of the word), the signified – *semainomenon* – (the notion) and the object thus named. Throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, and actually until the 19<sup>th</sup> century almost everything that came to be known about meaning in languages was the result of philosophic speculations and logical reasoning (Zdrengeha 1977: 2).

In ancient Greece, philosophers debated the problem of the ways in which words acquired their meaning. Basically, there were two competing views – the convention-based view and the naturalist view:

1. Some of them believed that the names of things were arrived at naturally, *physei*, that they were somehow conditioned by the natural properties of things themselves. ... The obvious inadvertencies of such correlations did not discourage philosophers from believing that it is the physical nature of the sounds of a name that can tell us something about its meaning.

2. Other philosophers held the opposite view, namely that names are given to things arbitrarily through convention, *thesei*. The *physei–thesei* controversy or *physis–nomos* controversy is amply discussed in Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*. In the dialogue, Cratylus appears to be a part of the *physei* theory of name acquisition, while Hermogenes defends the opposite, *nomos* or their point of view.<sup>2</sup>

## From the Middle Ages to the 20<sup>th</sup> century

From Antiquity until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, almost everything about the study of meaning was the result of the work of philosophers. It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that semantics became an independent branch of linguistics. A German linguist, Ch. C. Reisig, formulated the main ideas of this new science of meaning, which he started to call *semasiology*. Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some more important scientific writings furthered the cause of this branch. In 1897, M. Bréal published an important book, *Essay de sémantique*, which was soon translated into English and found an immediate echo in France as well as in other countries of Europe. Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* increased the interest for the study of structures in the field of semantics as well.

The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about the publication of three important books: Jost Trier, *Der Deutsche Wortschatz im Sinnbezirk des Verstandes*

2 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

(1931), G. Stern, *Meaning and change of meaning* (1931), and C. K. Ogden & J. A. Richards: *The meaning of meaning* (1923). Jost Trier's book was visibly influenced by W. von Humboldt's ideas on language. Analysing the meaning of a set of lexical elements related to one another by their content, and thus belonging to a semantic field, Trier reached the conclusion that they were structurally organized within this field, in such a manner that the significative value of each element was determined by the position which it occupied within the respective field. Ogden and Richards' book, *The meaning of meaning*, deals with the different accepted definitions of the word *meaning* (as mentioned earlier).<sup>3</sup>

In the period of 1930–1950, semantics was somehow neglected by scholars, who were clearly influenced by the representatives of American structuralism (e.g. L. Bloomfield, who considered that the study of meaning was outside the scope of linguistics proper). Semantics was banned from linguistic studies on the basis that it was not something observable. What is more, the most successful linguistic theory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Chomskyan generativism, also decided that semantics was not a central part of linguistic analysis. In their view, the central concern of language is syntax: linguistic knowledge is basically knowledge about syntax.

So, during most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

semantics was banned from linguistic studies (especially in American circles), first by Bloomfieldian structuralism and then by Chomskyan generativism. By the end of the century, however, some scholars started to rebel against this state of affairs, in the belief that that theoretical stance was incorrect and artificial. Since the 1980s, we start to find more and more opinions which are completely different.<sup>4</sup>

## More modern approaches and theories

At present, it is unanimously acknowledged that meaning cannot be left out when describing the ways language operates. One must mention the psycholinguistic approach to meaning: Lakoff's investigation of the metaphorical basis of meaning (Lakoff and Johnson 1980); Eleanor Rosch's cognitive notion of *prototype* and her anti-Chomskyan view stating that meaning cannot be separated from the more general cognitive functions of the mind.

Geoffrey Leech considers that “the developments which will bring most rewards in the future will be those which bring into a harmonious synthesis the insights provided by the three disciplines which claim the most direct and general interest in meaning: those of linguistics, philosophy and psychology”.<sup>5</sup>

3 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

4 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 4.

5 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

Nowadays, some authors say that there are two ways of approaching semantics: formal semantics and cognitive semantics.<sup>6</sup>

1. Formal semantics is connected with classical philosophical semantics, i.e. logic. The goal of formal semantics is to describe natural languages in a *formal*, precise, unambiguous way.

Formal semantics follows Frege's principle of compositionality: the meaning of the whole is a function of the meaning of the parts. Thus, syntax is clearly very important to this type of analysis; in fact, this approach connects with Chomskyan linguistics, in which syntax is actually the driving force in language. This type of semantics has proposed very precise and detailed analyses of sentences and propositions, though at the price of abandoning many of the factors affecting meaning, such as etymological, cultural or psychological considerations, and neglecting a detailed analysis of the meaning of words (lexical semantics).<sup>7</sup>

Among related denominations for formal semantics we mention: *truth-conditional* semantics, *model-theoretic* semantics, *logical* semantics, etc. In *truth-conditional* semantics, the goal is to describe the conditions that would have to be met for a sentence to be true.

2. Cognitive semantics, also called psychologically-oriented semantics, disregards the issues of truth values or strict compositionality, rather explaining meaning through biological, psychological, and even cultural filters. This approach does not consider the logical structure of language as important for the description of the meaning of language as formal semantics does.<sup>8</sup>

As Geeraerts (2009: 87) puts it, structuralist thinking had a major impact on lexical semantics: it shifted the attention from an almost exclusive focus on semantic change to the description of synchronic phenomena, and it provoked a change from semasiological to onomasiological studies, i.e. it pushed through the recognition that the vocabulary of the language is not just an unstructured bag of words, but that it is a network of expressions that are mutually related by all kinds of semantic links.

The major breakthrough of componential analysis occurred with the dawn of the Katzian model. When Jerrold J. Katz and Jerry A. Fodor introduced componential analysis into generative grammar, two things came to the foreground: explicit attention for the description of meaning in the context of a formal grammar and an increased interest in the psychological reality of meaning.

Katz and Fodor's componential analysis does not take its starting-point in a contrastive analysis of a set of words belonging to the same lexical field...

6 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 4.

7 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 4.

8 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 4.

Rather, they give an example of the way in which the different meanings of one single word, when analyzed componentially, can be represented in a formalized dictionary as part of a formal grammar (like the generative grammars that were rapidly becoming fashionable when Katz and Fodor presented their model)... let us note that the components which appear in the work of Katz and Fodor do not show the plus/minus notation that is used by Pottier: features like (Old) and (Young) co-occur together, but from their formal representation it does not emerge that they are the poles of a functional opposition, as would be the case if they were rendered as +OLD versus - OLD (Geeraerts 2009: 98).

Neostructuralist semantics or cognitive semantic trends include Wierzbicka's model of semantic primitives.

The most thorough-going example of a theory of semantic primitives in modern linguistics is the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) theory of Wierzbicka and Goddard, also known as Wierzbicka's model of semantic primitives. ... Painstaking cross-linguistic research in this framework has led to the development of the following list of semantic primitives which the NSM approach uses for the definition of meaning:

*I, you, someone, people, something/thing, body; this, the same, other; one, two, some, all, much/many; good, bad; big, small; think, know, want, feel, see, hear; say, words, true; do, happen, move; there is, have; live, die; when/ time, now, before, after a long time, a short time, for some time; where/ place, here, above, below, far, near, side, inside; not, maybe, can, because, if; very, more; kind of, part of; like.* (Goddard 2002: 14) These 58 elements represent the 'atoms of meaning' which are claimed to be impossible to define in a non-circular manner, and which can be used to fashion definitions for a large range of words (Riemer 2010: 71–71).<sup>9</sup>

The metalanguage is composed of semantic primitives, which are basic undefinable concepts used to describe the whole vocabulary. Semantic primitives are assumed to be universal because they represent basic conceptual entities, and they are language-dependent (see the chapter on theories of meaning).

Ray Jackendoff in his model of Conceptual Semantics relies on the belief that

the formal semantic representation does not contain all the information that is relevant to explain the language user's conceptual competence. Rather, that information is to be situated on the level of 'conceptual structure'; within such conceptual structures, other modes of cognition,

<sup>9</sup> Circularity is the definition of a word/phrase with the help of the word/phrase itself or its synonyms. Knowledge of the meaning of a word means knowing the definition of that particular word: e.g. *coffee* is a drink obtained by infusing ground coffee beans or a *mobile phone* is a phone that is mobile, i.e. it can be carried around. Circular definitions are descriptions of word meanings that are based on the words themselves or on synonymous lexemes, which are all defined in terms of each other.

like perceptual knowledge and motor schemas, may play their role together with linguistic knowledge (Geeraerts 2009: 128).

Cognitive semantics emerged in the 1980s as part of cognitive linguistics, “a loosely structured theoretical movement that opposed the autonomy of grammar and the secondary position of semantics in the generativist theory of language” (Geeraerts 2009: 166). The author mentions among the most specific contributions of cognitive semantics: the prototype model of category structure, the conceptual theory of metaphor and metonymy.

The prototype-based conception of categorization originated in the mid-1970s with Eleanor Rosch’s psycholinguistic research into the internal structure of categories. When presenting Rosch’s idea of prototypes, Geeraerts comments that prototypical categories exhibit degrees of typicality; not every member is equally representative for a category. Second, prototypical categories exhibit a family resemblance structure, or more generally, their semantic structure takes the form of a radial set of clustered and overlapping readings. Third, prototypical categories are blurred at the edges. Fourth, prototypical categories cannot be defined by means of a single set of criterial (necessary and sufficient) attributes (Geeraerts 2009: 170) (see the chapter on theories of meaning).

George Lakoff’s *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* represents the standard view of metaphor in cognitive semantics.

The cognitive nature of metaphor involves the fact that it is not a purely lexical phenomenon, situated superficially at the level of the language, but that it is rather a deep-seated conceptual phenomenon that shapes the way we think (and not just the way we speak). Proponents of Conceptual Metaphor Theory have sometimes tended to over-emphasize the novelty of this view. If we think back of what we learned about historical-philological semantics, it should be clear that in the tradition of linguistic semantics, metaphor was not just seen as a rhetorical embellishment, as the enthusiasts of Conceptual Metaphors Theory tend to claim: already in the historical-philological tradition, metaphor was recognized as a cognitive rather than a stylistic mechanism. ... But even if the cognitive conception is not as revolutionary as suggested, Conceptual Metaphor Theory systematically adduces various kinds of evidence for the conceptual rather than just lexical nature of metaphors. First, metaphor comes in patterns that transcend the individual lexical item. ... Second, metaphorical images may be used creatively. Third, metaphorical patterns occur outside of language (Geeraerts 2009: 180–184).

A simple case of non-linguistic metaphor is the *thumbs up* gesture: good is up and bad is down.

In Lakoff and Johnson, metonymy figures next to metaphor as one of the conceptual mechanisms behind the semantic structure of language. They list a number of metonymic patterns, quoted by Geeraerts:

The part for the whole

*We don't hire longhairs. Get your butt over here. The Giants need a stronger arm in right field.*

Producer for product

*He's got a Picasso in his den. I hate to read Heidegger. He bought a Ford.*

Object used for user

*The sax has the flu today. The buses are on strike. The gun he hired wanted 50 grand.*

Controller for controlled

*Nixon bombed Hanoi. Napoleon lost at Waterloo.*

The place for the institution

*Washington is insensitive to the needs of the people. Paris is introducing longer skirts this season. Wall Street is in a panic.*

The place for the event

*Pearl Harbour still has an effect on our foreign policy. Watergate changed our politics. Let's not let Thailand become another Vietnam* (Geeraerts 2009: 185–186).



## DEFINING SEMANTICS. DEFINING MEANING

### What is semantics?

In this chapter, we will synthesise opinions regarding the definition of semantics and the definition of meaning.

Three disciplines are concerned with the systematic study of meaning in itself: psychology, philosophy and linguistics. Their particular interests and approaches are different, yet each borrows from and contributes to the others.

Psychologists are interested in how individual humans learn, how they retain, recall, or lose information; how they classify, make judgements and solve problems – in other words, how the human mind seeks meanings and works with them.

Philosophers of language are concerned with how we know, how any particular fact that we know or accept as true is related to other possible facts – what must be antecedent (a presupposition) to that fact and what is a likely consequence, or entailment of it; what statements are mutually contradictory, which sentences express the same meaning in different words, and which are unrelated. ... Linguists want to understand how language works. Just what common knowledge do two people possess when they share a language – English, Swahili, Korean or whatever – that makes it possible for them to give and get information, to express their feelings and their intentions to one another, and to be understood with a fair degree of success? Linguistics is concerned with identifying the meaningful elements of specific languages (Kreidler 1998: 2–3).

Bréal defines semantics as the science of the meanings of words and of the changes in their meaning. With this definition, semantics is included under lexicology, the more general science of words, being its most important branch.<sup>10</sup>

R. S. Ginzburg et alii also include semantics within the larger field of lexicology:

The branch of lexicology that is devoted to the study of meaning is known as semasiology. Semasiology is coming to the fore as the central problem of linguistic investigation of all levels of language structure. It is suggested that semasiology has for its subject-matter not only the study of lexicon,



but also of morphology, syntax and sentential semantics. Words, however, play such a crucial part in the structure of language that when we speak of semasiology without any qualification, we usually refer to the study of word-meaning proper, although it is in fact very common to explore the semantics of other elements, such as suffixes, prefixes, etc. Meaning is one of the most controversial terms in the theory of language.

At first sight, the understanding of this term seems to present no difficulty at all – it is freely used in teaching, interpreting and translation.

The scientific definition of meaning however just as the definition of some other basic linguistic terms, such as word, sentence, etc., has been the issue of interminable discussions (Ginzburg 1979: 12).

Ogden and Richards (1923) in their *The meanings of meaning* state that for language to fulfil communicative function/convey a message: form must have content. There are two basic approaches:

– semasiological = FORM ---> CONTENT

E.g. *chair* means 1. thing to sit on, 2. professor;

– onomasiological = CONTENT ---> FORM

E.g. *things to sit on* are called: chair, arm-chair, stool, sofa, couch, etc.

The term *semasiology* is sometimes used instead of semantics, with exactly the same meaning.

However,

semasiology stands for the study of meaning starting from the “signifiant” (the acoustic image) of a sign and examining the possible “signifiés” attached to it. Onomasiology accounts for the opposite direction of study, namely from a “signifié” to the various “signifiants” that may stand for it. ...

A distinction should be made between *lexosemantics*, which studies lexical meaning proper in the traditional terminology and *morphosemantics*, which studies the grammatical aspect of word-meaning.<sup>11</sup>

Here are some definitions of semantics:

*Semantics is the study of meaning.* Lyons (1977)

*Semantics is the study of meaning in language.* Hurford and Heasley (1983)

*Semantics is the study of meaning communicated through language.* Saeed (1997)

*Semantics is the part of linguistics that is concerned with meaning.* Löbner (2002)

*Linguistic semantics is the study of literal, decontextualized, grammatical meaning.* Frawley (1992)

*Linguistic semantics is the study of how languages organize and express meanings.* Kreidler (1998)<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

<sup>12</sup> *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 1.

There is no complete agreement as far as the definition of semantics is concerned. For some, semantics concerns the study of meaning as communicated through language, while for some others semantics studies *all* aspects of meaning, and they have to add the label “linguistic” to arrive at a more precise definition.<sup>13</sup>

Semantics is the study of meaning in language, state Hurford et alii (2007: 1), whereas Griffiths considers that:

Semantics is the study of context-independent knowledge that users of a language have of word and sentence meaning. The meanings of constructions are compositionally assembled out of the meanings of smaller units, and what comes into the scope of which operations can influence the meaning of a construction.

Semantics is descriptive, and not centrally concerned with how words came historically to have the meanings they do. Nor do semanticists aim to write encyclopedic summaries of all human knowledge. An explicated utterance (based on a declarative sentence) expresses a proposition, which can be true or false. The central kind of inference in semantics is entailment. Entailments are propositions guaranteed to be true when a given proposition is true, though we can, loosely, think of entailing as a connection between sentences.

The sense of a word determines what it denotes (how it relates to the world outside of language) and the entailment possibilities that the word gives to sentences (Griffiths 2006: 21–22).

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

Thus, we differentiate:

- Lexical semantics (words and meaning relationship among words): word meaning;
- Phrasal/sentential semantics (syntactic units larger than a word): sentence meaning.

Semantics is “the study of meaning expressed by elements of a language, characterizable as a symbolic system”.<sup>14</sup>

Semantics has also been defined as the systematic study of meaning, and linguistic semantics is the study of how languages organize and express meanings (Kreidler 1998: 2–3).

Semantics and pragmatics are closely related terms in language study. *Semantics* refers to the construction of meaning in language, while pragmatics refers to meaning construction in specific interactional contexts or to language in interaction. Semantics is concerned with the more abstract study of general, conventional meaning within language structure.

13 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 1.

14 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 3.

These two disciplines of language study are thus firmly linked, and establishing a clear distinction between them is difficult as they tend to blur into one another. Similarly, in recent years there has also been a blurring of the boundaries of semantics and other disciplinary areas of language study as linguists have increasingly realised that it is misleading to treat sentence meaning in isolation from its surrounding context (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 10).

The distinction between sentence meaning and utterance meaning is also linked to the difference between semantics and pragmatics.

For those linguists who accept such a division, semantics is taken to study sentence meaning, whereas pragmatics studies utterance meaning and other principles of language use. The job of semantics is to study the basic, literal meanings of words as considered principally as parts of a language system, whereas pragmatics concentrates on the ways in which these basic meanings are used in practice, including such topics as the ways in which different expressions are assigned referents in different contexts, and the differing (ironic, metaphorical, etc.) uses to which language is put. As we have already seen, a division between semantics and pragmatics is by no means universally accepted in linguistics. Many pragmatic topics are of central importance to the study of meaning (Riemer 2010: 22).

The subject matter of semantics (and also pragmatics) is more difficult to grasp than that of other linguistics disciplines.

A noise or a scribble and sign-language gestures are physical objects. They are physical objects just like your left shoe, the trees outside of this building and the twitterings of birds. However, unlike those other physical objects, a noise that I make when I speak or a scribble on paper has meaning. It is about something. This is apparently what makes linguistic signs like words different from your left shoe or the twitterings of birds, which are not *about* anything, as far as we can tell. The property of aboutness of linguistic signs (= symbols) is one of the defining properties of natural languages.<sup>15</sup>

The word *semantics* is used to designate the science of word-meaning. The term, however, has acquired a number of senses in contemporary science. Also, a number of other terms have been proposed to cover the same area of study. As to meaning itself, the term has a variety of uses in the metalanguage of several sciences such as logic, psychology, linguistics, and semiotics.<sup>16</sup>

In the more general science of semiotics, the term *semantics* is used in two senses:

15 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 3.

16 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

(a) *theoretical* (pure) semantics, which aims at formulating an abstract theory of meaning in the process of cognition, and therefore belongs to logic, more precisely to symbolic logic;

(b) *empirical (linguistic) semantics*, which studies meaning in natural languages, that is the relationship between linguistic signs and their meaning. Obviously, of the two types of semantics, it is empirical semantics that falls within the scope of linguistics.<sup>17</sup>

With the advent of generative grammar,

emphasis was switched from the meaning of words to the meaning of sentences. Semantic analysis will accordingly be required to explain how sentences are understood by the speakers of language. Also, the task of semantic analysis is to explain the relations existing among sentences, why certain sentences are anomalous, although grammatically correct, why other sentences are semantically ambiguous, since they admit of several interpretations, why other sentences are synonymous or paraphrases of each other, etc. ... generative semantics does include a representation of the meaning of lexical elements, but a total interpretation of a sentence depends on its syntactic structure as well, more particularly on how these meanings of words are woven into syntactic structure in order to allow for the correct interpretation of sentences and to relate them to objective reality. In the case of generative semantics, it is obvious that we can speak of *syntactic semantics*, which includes a much wider area of study than lexical semantics.<sup>18</sup>

Of greater importance is the study of the way in which words and sentences convey meaning in everyday situations of speech and writing. Meaning is not some kind of entity separate from language. The primary focus of modern semantics is on the way people relate words to each other within the framework of their language: the focus is on their *sense*, rather than on their reference.<sup>19</sup>

Semantics, basically, has two meanings: it means *knowledge of meanings* (from the point of view of the speaker) or the *description of meanings* (from a linguist's point of view), of meaningful units like words and meaningful combinations of words like sentences. Semantic knowledge and the knowledge of meanings is the general implicit knowledge that speakers have about meaning in their language.

Speakers know, in a general way, whether something is or is not meaningful in their language. Speakers of a language generally agree as to when two sentences have essentially the same meaning and when they do not. Speakers generally agree when two words have essentially the same

17 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

18 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

19 Kordula De Kuthy, *Linguistics 201*, October 8, 2001, downloaded from: <http://www.ling.ohio-state.edu/~kdk/201/autumn01/slides/semantics-4up.pdf>

meaning in a given context. Speakers generally agree when two words have opposite meanings in a given context. Speakers recognize when the meaning of one sentence contradicts another sentence. Some sentences have double meanings; they can be interpreted in two ways. Speakers are aware of this fact because they appreciate jokes which depend on two-way interpretation. Speakers know how language is used when people interact. While linguistic semantics is concerned with the language system that people have in common that makes them able to communicate with one another, pragmatics is the study (and description) of how people actually use language in communicating (Kreidler 1998: 39).

## Semantics and other linguistic disciplines

The articulation and perception of speech sounds (articulatory, acoustic, and auditory) is the domain of phonetics. Phonology is the study of the sound patterns of human language. “Phonology is the knowledge, or the description, of how speech sounds are organized in a particular language – these are units called phonemes which combine in various possible ways (but not all possible ways) to express meaningful units such as words” (Kreidler 1998: 7).

Morphology studies the structure of words and the smallest meaning-bearing units and how they combine into words: “morphology, the description or the knowledge of word formation: the account of different forms of the ‘same’ word (*cat, cats; connect, connecting, connected*) and the derivation of different words which share a basic meaning (*connect, disconnect, connection*)” (Kreidler 1998: 8).

Syntax examines the formation of sentences, how words are combined into larger units than words, into phrases and sentences. “Syntax is the knowledge, or the description, of the classes of words, sometimes called parts of speech, and of how members of these classes go together to form phrases and sentences” (Kreidler 1998: 8).

Semantics is the study of *meaning* in language. Semantics deals with the meaning of words, and how the meanings of sentences are derived from them. In the overall structure of linguistics, semantics resides somewhere between syntax and morphology, on the one hand, and pragmatics, or the study of language use, on the other. Syntax and semantics are distinct but intertwined in many ways, and pragmatics is built on top of semantics.<sup>20</sup>

The study of how meaning is encoded in a language is the central business of semantics, and it is generally assumed that its main concern is with the meanings of words as lexical items. But we should note that it is not only concerned with words as such. As we have seen, meaning also

20 Kordula De Kuthy, *Linguistics* 201, October 8, 2001, downloaded from: <http://www.ling.ohio-state.edu/~kdk/201/autumn01/slides/semantics-4up.pdf>.

figures at levels of language below the word and above it. Morphemes are meaningful, for example: the derivational prefix *pre-* means 'before', so a 'prefix' means 'something fixed before'. 'Unfixed' means 'not fixed', 'refixed', 'fixed again'. The inflectional morphemes are meaningful too: 'fixed' signals 'past' in contrast with 'fixes' which signals 'present' (and third person subject). Semantics is also necessarily implicated in syntax, the constituent structure 'People in Oxford/ride/bikes' means something different from 'People/ride/bikes/in Oxford'. Similarly, 'The bishop offended the actress' and 'The actress offended the bishop' are quite distinct in meaning, because word order is a syntactic device in English and so we assign subject status to the first noun phrase in each case. In both examples we have exactly the same collection of words; it is only the way they are ordered that makes them different (Widdowson 1996: 53).

## The dimensions of meaning

There is, first of all, a *semantic dimension* proper, which covers the denotatum of the sign including also information as to how the denotatum is actually referred to, from what point of view it is being considered. The first aspect is the signification, the latter is its sense.

E.g. *Lord Byron/Author of Child Harold* have similar signification and different senses.

*The logical dimension* of meaning covers the information conveyed by the linguistic expression on the denotatum, including a judgement of it.

E.g. *He accused her of something.* (accused implicates a moral judgement, i.e. that that something was morally wrong or unethical).

*The pragmatic dimension* defines the purpose of the expression, why it is uttered by a speaker. The relation emphasized is between language users and language signs.

E.g. *I'll be back.* (as a promise) vs. *I'll be back!* (as a threat).

*The structural dimension* covers the structure of linguistic expressions, the complex network of relationships among its component elements as well as between it and other expressions.<sup>21</sup>

E.g. *I painted the wall white* vs. *I painted the white wall.*

21 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

## Defining meaning

All animals have some system for communicating with other members of their species, but only humans have a language which allows them to produce and understand ever-new messages and to do so without any outside stimulus and using a finite number of tools. Human language differs from animal communication systems in two crucial ways: human communication has stimulus-freedom and creativity.

First, animals can communicate only in response to some particular stimulus. In general, non-human communication takes place on the spot, and is concerned with what is immediately present. No animal can tell another one about past experiences, and still less are they able to communicate their plans for the future. Humans alone are able to talk about vast numbers of things which come from accumulated knowledge, memory and imagination.

Human language is stimulus-free. Second, while animals have only a fixed repertoire of messages, human language is creative: we are always producing new utterances which others understand; we comprehend new sentences which others have produced (Kreidler 1998: 3).

Because language is creative, our communication is not restricted to a fixed set of topics; “we constantly produce and understand new messages in response to new situations and new experiences. At the same time, language use is subject to very specific rules and constraints. There seems to be an infinite number of things we can say, but a language does not have an infinite number of words, nor an infinite number of ways of combining words” (Kreidler 1998: 6).

What is meaning? What makes words and other linguistic units meaningful is that they are about the things in the world. Their relation to the things in the world makes them meaningful. But meanings, as Filip puts it, the entities that semantics investigates, cannot be directly observed. It is important to notice that meanings are not located somehow in the physical shape of words, that is, words cannot be defined in terms of physics.

Meaning cannot be defined in terms of physics as:

in general, there are no physical features that all meaningful noises or sets of marks have in common which serve to differentiate them from other signals or noises. Usually there is no resemblance between a name and the thing it is the name of. Linguistic forms usually lack any physical resemblance with the entities that they stand for. Not only do languages vary in their vocabularies, but also within one language the relation between the words and what they stand for changes (e.g. *gay*). Ferdinand de Saussure showed that the connection between a word and



what it stands for is arbitrary and conventional. This is one of the defining properties of human language.<sup>22</sup>

Filip links her argumentation to the Saussurean arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, the fact that connection between a word and what it stands for is arbitrary. There is non-resemblance between sound and meaning, the relationship is said to be arbitrary and convention-based. Thus, there is an indirect relationship between the word and the world:

#### INDIRECT RELATION BETWEEN THE WORD AND THE WORLD

word ——— a concept, idea, thought ——— thing in the world<sup>23</sup>

The meaning of words cannot be derived from their physical properties, it cannot be reduced to the real-world objects or their perception, and it cannot be reduced to the particular image in my or your mind. The meaning of words is to be derived from the relations between words, concepts and things in the real world. ... Meaning that is conveyed by some signs. What a given linguistic sign is about or represents must be publicly recognized, accepted, acknowledged, or otherwise believed by the language users, in other words what a linguistic sign represents is determined by some publicly accepted convention....

Following John Searle ... we may say that the representational aboutness function of a language sign X is constituted by the symbolic 'stand for' relation, where one thing X represents another Y (its status function or meaning) by convention that is publicly acknowledged.

X (symbol) stands for Y (meaning) in context C, and it does so by some public convention....

Linguistic signs *mean* or *represent* or *symbolize* something beyond their purely physical properties.<sup>24</sup>

The morpheme is the minimum unit of language endowed with meaning; still, it is the word, the next higher unit that traditional semantics has selected as its object of study. To understand the factors involved in meaning, it is necessary to begin with an analysis of meaning at the level of the words. The concept of meaning may be seen as (1) a bipolar relation or as (2) a triadic relation:

1. a bipolar relation – The concept of meaning, defined by F. de Saussure, was first regarded as a bipolar relation between the two interdependent sides of a linguistic sign – *significans* 'expression' and *significatum* 'content', and this is

22 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 4.

23 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 6.

24 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 7–10.



true for any sign, no matter to what semiotic system it belongs.<sup>25</sup>

2. a triadic relation – Ogden and Richards have pointed out in 1923 that at least three factors are involved in any symbolic act – *the symbol itself*: ‘the material aspect of the linguistic sign, be it phonic or graphic’; *the thought/reference*: ‘the mental content that accompanies the occurrence of the symbol in the minds of both the speaker and the listener’; *the object itself/the referent*: ‘the object in the real world designated by the symbol.’<sup>26</sup>

Thus, we can distinguish two main approaches to meaning or two main types of semantic theories: A. referential approach, or *denotational approach*—meaning is the action of putting words into relationship with the world; B. conceptual approach or *the representational* meaning is the notion, the concept, or the mental image of the object or situation in reality as reflected in man’s mind.

## Word meaning

Word meaning is what a word means, i.e. what it counts as the equivalent of in the language concerned (Hurford et alii 2007: 16).

Word meaning is the amount of meaning comprised at the level of words. Semantic meaning of words is the type of meaning that is listed in dictionaries.<sup>27</sup> As Hurford et alii state:

A dictionary is a central part of the description of any language. A good ordinary household dictionary typically gives (at least) three kinds of information about words: phonological information about how the word is pronounced, grammatical (syntactical and morphological) information about its part of speech (e.g. noun, verb) and inflections (e.g. for plural number or past tense), and semantic information about the word’s meaning.... A dictionary tells you what words mean. The semanticist dictionary-writer and the ordinary dictionary-writer have quite similar goals, but they differ markedly in their style of approach and the emphasis which they place on their various goals (Hurford et alii 2007: 194–195).

What is the difference between meaning and concept? Concept is a category of human cognition, it is the thought of the object that singles out its essential features. “Our concepts abstract and reflect the most common and typical features of the different objects and phenomena of the world. Being the result of abstraction and generalization, all concepts are thus intrinsically almost the

25 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

26 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

27 A *DICTIONARY* describes the senses of predicates.

An *ENCYCLOPAEDIA* contains factual information of a variety of types, but, generally, no information specifically on the meanings of words (Hurford et alii, 2007: 201).

same for the whole of humanity in one and the same period of its historical development" (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 15).

The meanings of words, however, are different in different languages. Words expressing identical concepts may have different meanings and different semantic structures in different languages. "The difference between meaning and concept can also be observed by comparing synonymous words and word-groups expressing essentially the same concepts but possessing linguistic meaning which is felt as different in each of the units under consideration, e.g. *big, large; to die, to pass away, to kick the bucket, to join the majority; child, baby, babe, infant*" (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 15).

The system showing a word in all of its word forms is called its *paradigm*. The lexical meaning of a word is the same throughout the paradigm, i.e. all the word forms of one and the same word are lexically identical. The grammatical meaning varies from one form to another (*to take, takes, took, taking* or *singer, singer's, singers, singers'*) (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 10).

Each part of speech is characterized by a paradigm of its own: nouns are declined; verbs are conjugated, and qualitative adjectives have degrees of comparison. Some adverbs also have degrees of comparison (e.g. *well, badly*, etc.), while others do not and, therefore, are immutable (e.g. *here, there, never*). Word forms constituting a paradigm may be both synthetic and analytic.

Unlike synthetic forms, an analytic form is composed of two separate components ((he) *takes* ... and (he) *has taken* ...). In some cases, the system of word forms combines different roots (*to go – went – gone; good – better – best*). Besides the grammatical forms of words, i.e. word forms, some scholars distinguish lexical varieties which they term variants of words.

Distinction is made between two basic groups of variants of words. In actual speech, a word or, to be more exact, a polysemantic word is used in one of its meanings. Such a word in one of its meanings is described as lexico-semantic variant. Thus, Group One comprises lexico-semantic variants, i.e. polysemantic words in each of their meanings, as exemplified by the meaning of the verb *to learn* in word-groups like *to learn at school*, cf. *to learn about (of) smth*, etc.

Group Two comprises phonetic and morphological variants. As examples of phonetic variants, the pronouncing variants of the adverbs *often* and *again* can be given, cf. [ˈo:fn] and [ˈo:ftən], [əˈgeɪn] and [əˈgen]. The two variant forms of the past indefinite tense of verbs like *to learn* illustrate morphological variants, cf. *learned* [-d] and *learnt* [-t]. Parallel formations of the *geologic – geological, phonetic – phonetical* type also enter the group of morphological variants. It may be easily observed that the most essential feature of variants of words of both groups is that a slight change in the morphemic or phonemic composition of a word is not connected with any modification of its meaning and, vice versa, a change in meaning

is not followed by any structural changes, either morphemic or phonetic” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 11).

## Sentence meaning

A sentence is a grammatically complete string of words expressing a (partial) complete thought (Hurford et alii 2007: 19).

Simple declarative sentences are taken to express certain assumptions about reality, and if we understand sentences correctly we are able to say whether these assumptions are true or false. The reference of a sentence is its truth.<sup>28</sup>

Sentence meaning is what a sentence means, i.e. what it counts as the equivalent of in the language concerned (Hurford et alii 2007: 16).

The meaning of a sentence derives from the meanings of its constituent lexemes and from the grammatical meanings it contains. “So if you know all the lexical and grammatical meanings expressed in a sentence, you know the meaning of the sentence, and vice versa. Second, at least if the sentence is a statement, if you know the meaning of the sentence, you know what conditions are necessary in the world for that sentence to be true”<sup>29</sup> (Kreidler 1998: 56).

The meaning derived from what we hear or read beyond what is actually stated in the sentence is not the realm of semantics (it is rather the domain of pragmatics). “In semantics we are not interested in intuitions or hints but we are interested in the instances when the language of the message implicates some additional meaning that accounts for our inference” (Kreidler 1998: 56). Semantics studies sentence meaning, whereas pragmatics studies utterance meanings and other aspects of language use. “Sentence meaning is the compositional meaning of the sentence as constructed out of the meanings of its individual component lexemes, whereas utterance meaning is the meaning which the words have on a particular occasion of use in the particular context in which they occur” (Riemer 2010: 31). Semantics is concerned with the meanings of non-sentences, such as phrases and incomplete sentences, just as much as with whole sentences (Hurford et alii 2007: 20).

An utterance is any stretch of talk, by one person, before and after which there is silence on the part of that person. An utterance is the use by a particular speaker, on a particular occasion, of a piece of language, such as a sequence of sentences, or a single phrase, or even a single word (Hurford et alii 2007: 16). Speaker meaning is what a speaker means (i.e. intends to convey) when he uses

28 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf), 17.

29 According to Kreidler, (1998: 56), truth-conditional semantics is the study of meaning through a consideration of the conditions that must exist for a sentence to be true, and how the truth of one sentence relates to the truth or falsity of other sentences.

a piece of language (Hurford et alii 2007: 3).

All in all, to understand language and to decode meaning, one must know the meaning of words and of the morphemes that compose them but must also know how to combine words into meaningful phrases and sentences. This is the realm of semantics. Knowledge of the role played by context and how it determines the meaning of what is being said is part of pragmatics.



## APPROACHES TO MEANING

There are three ways of describing meaning, i.e. three types of semantic analysis:

- Focusing on semantic features: considering words as containers of certain semantic features: *semantic feature analysis* or *componential analysis*;
- Focusing on the semantic roles they fulfil: *semantic roles*;
- Focusing on the relationship with other words: *lexical relations* or *semantic relations*.

Consequently, there are three types of semantic analysis:

- Semantic features (or componential analysis);
- Semantic roles;
- Semantic relations (lexical relations).

Ginzburg et alii have introduced the concept of *functional approach to meaning*. They claim 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. ... (1) semantic investigation is confined to the analysis of the difference or sameness of meaning; (2) meaning is understood essentially as the function of the use of linguistic units. The functional approach is sometimes described as contextual, as it is based on the analysis of various contexts” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 17).

They illustrate this view by the following examples: we know, for instance, that the meaning of the two words *move* and *movement* is different because they function in speech differently. Comparing the contexts in which we find these words, we cannot fail to observe that they occupy different positions in relation to other words: (to) *move*, e.g., can be followed by a noun (*move the chair*), preceded by a pronoun (*we move*), etc. The position occupied by the word *movement* is different: it may be followed by a preposition (*movement of something*), preceded by an adjective (*slow movement*), and so on.

The same is true of the different meanings of one and the same word. For example, we can observe the difference in the meanings of the word *take* if we examine its functions in different linguistic contexts such as *take the tram (the taxi, the cab, etc.)* as opposed to *take to somebody*.

## Semantic fields and semantic features

Semantic features may be understood better by introducing the concept of semantic fields. We all know that in communication it may occur that we come across syntactically correct but semantically unusual sentences (e.g. *The hamburger ate the boy. My cat studies linguistics. Colourless green ideas sleep furiously.*). This oddness relates to the conceptual components of the words *hamburger*, *cat*, *idea* (*not human*), a semantic property clearly shown by semantic feature analysis. Semantic properties refer to the components of meaning of a word. Meaning is perceived as a collection of properties/features typically with two possible values (+/-).

*The hamburger ate the boy.* This sentence is syntactically good, but semantically odd. Since the sentence *The boy ate the hamburger* is perfectly acceptable, we may be able to identify the source of the problem. The components of the conceptual meaning of the noun *hamburger* must be significantly different from those of the noun *boy*, thereby preventing one, and not the other, from being 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. The noun *hamburger* does not have this property and the noun *boy* does (Yule 2010: 114).

## The theory of semantic fields (conceptual or semantic fields)

The idea of the organization of the entire lexicon into a unitary system was for the first time formulated by Jost Trier, the pioneer of semantic field theory.

Trier advanced the idea that vocabulary as a whole forms an integrated system of lexemes interrelated in sense, a huge mosaic. Semantic fields with a more restricted number of terms are incorporated into larger ones; the latter are themselves structured into even larger ones, until the entire lexicon of a language is integrated into a unitary system. In Trier's opinion, therefore, semantic fields act as intermediaries between individual lexical entries, as they appear in a dictionary, and the vocabulary as a whole. P. Guiraud developed the theory of the *morpho-semantic field*. The morpho-semantic field includes all the sound and sense associations radiating from a word; its homonyms and synonyms, all other words to which it may be related formally or logically, metaphorically, etc., as well as casual or more stable associations which can be established between objects designated by these words.<sup>30</sup>

Words may be classified according to the concepts underlying their meaning. Semantic fields are closely knit areas of the lexicon, each characterized by a common feature.

The members of the semantic fields are not synonyms but all of them are joined together by some common semantic component. This semantic component common to all the members of the field is sometimes described as the *common denominator of meaning*. Thus, the semantic field may be viewed as a set of lexical items in which the meaning of each is determined by the co-presence of the others (all members of the field are semantically interdependent as each member helps to delimit and determine the meaning of its neighbours and is semantically delimited and determined by them: the word-meaning is to a great extent determined by the place it occupies in its semantic field).

For example, the words *blue, red, yellow, black*, etc. may be described as making up the semantic field of colours” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 52).

Another example offered by Ginzburg et alii is the meaning of the word *captain*, which cannot be properly understood until we know the semantic field in which this unit operates – the army, the navy, or the merchant service. “It follows that the meaning of the word *captain* is determined by the place it occupies among the terms of the relevant rank system. In other words, we know what captain means only if we know whether his subordinate is called *mate* or *first officer* (merchant service), *commander* (navy) or *lieutenant* (army)” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 52).

The semantic component or semantic feature (common to all the members of the field), which is called *the common denominator of meaning*, can be clearly illustrated on the concept of kinship, colour, parts of the human body, and so on. Hyponymy is the semantic relationship of inclusion existing between elements of various levels: e.g. *vehicle* includes *car, bus, taxi*; *oak* implies *tree*; *horse* implies *animal*; *table* implies *furniture*.

The hyponymic relationship is the relationship between the meaning of the general and the individual terms. A hyperonym is a generic term which serves as the name of the general as distinguished from the names of the species-hyponyms. In other words, the more specific term is called the hyponym. For instance, *animal* is a generic term as compared to the specific names *wolf, dog* or *mouse* (these are called equonyms). *Dog*, in its turn, may serve as a generic term for different breeds such as *bull-dog, collie*.<sup>31</sup>

As Laurel J. Brinton puts it in her *The structure of Modern English*, the words which are part of a semantic field enter into sense or meaning relationships with one another. Each word delimits the meaning of the next word in the field and is delimited by it; that is, it marks off an area or range within the semantic domain.



However, there may be a fair amount of overlap in meaning between words in a domain, and it is often difficult to find mutually delimiting terms. Within a domain, some words are marked, while some are unmarked; the unmarked members are more frequent, more basic, broader in meaning, easier to learn and remember, not metaphorical, and typically one morpheme or single lexical item. The marked members often consist of more than one lexical item and may denote a subtype of the unmarked member.<sup>32</sup>

Let's consider some examples of semantic fields.

The field of *parts of the face* is a substantive field of part to whole. Terms within the field are arranged spatially and quite clearly delimited, though there is some overlap between terms such as *forehead* and *temple*.

Terms such as *bridge of the nose* or *eyelids* would constitute marked members of the field. The field of "stages of life" is arranged sequentially, though there is considerable overlap between terms (e.g., *child*, *toddler*) as well as some apparent gaps (e.g., there are no simple terms for the different stages of adulthood). Note that a term such as *minor* or *juvenile* belongs to a technical register, a term such as *kid* or *tot* to a colloquial register, and a term such as *sexagenarian* or *octogenarian* to a more formal register. The semantic field of "water" could be divided into a number of subfields; in addition, there would appear to be a great deal of overlap between terms such as *sound/fjord* or *cove/harbor/bay*. The semantic field of "clothing" is a particularly rich one, with many unmarked terms (such as *dress* or *pants*) as well as many marked terms (such as *pedal-pushers* or *smoking jacket*). The field of clothing might be organized in many different ways – by sex of wearer, by occasion of wearing, by body part covered, and so on. Finally, the field of "jewelry" would seem to include quite well delimited terms, with a number of unmarked terms. Examples of Semantic Fields: Parts of the Face: *forehead brow temples nose nostrils bridge/tip of the nose septum mouth lips eyes eyebrows eyelids eyelashes chin cheeks jaw jowls*.<sup>33</sup>

## Componential analysis

One way of studying lexical meaning is by analysing words into a series of semantic features, or components. "According to semantic field (or semantic domain) theory, lexemes can be classified according to shared and differentiating features. The semantic features explain how the members of the set are related

32 Laurel J. Brinton, *The structure of Modern English: Workbook*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, downloaded from: <https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/iverson/www/docs/6.pdf>. 112–113.

33 Laurel J. Brinton, *The structure of Modern English: Workbook*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, downloaded from: <https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/iverson/www/docs/6.pdf>. 112–113.

to one another and can be used to differentiate them from one another. The determination of such features has been called componential analysis.”<sup>34</sup> Componential analysis was developed in the second half of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s by European as well as American linguists, largely independently of one another.

Although both find a common inspiration in structural phonology, componential analysis in Europe grew out of lexical field theory, whereas in the United States, it originated in the domain of anthropological linguistics without any specific link to European field theory. The American branch emerged from linguistic anthropology, in studies like Alfred Kroeber (1952), Harold Conklin (1955), Ward Goodenough (1956) and Floyd Lounsbury (1956). In Europe, the first step in the direction of componential analysis can be found in the work of Louis Hjelmslev (1953), but the full development does not occur before the early 1960s, in the work of Bernard Pottier (1964, 1965), Eugenio Coseriu (1962, 1964, 1967) and Algirdas Greimas (1966) (Geeraerts 2009: 69–70).

The structuralist climate in the United States was anything but favourable to semantic studies in the 1960s. This was mainly due to the fact that Leonard Bloomfield,

the most influential figure of American structuralism, held the behaviourist view that the meaning of a linguistic form is something in extralinguistic reality – in particular, a psychological stimulus:... Bloomfield remarks that there is nothing in the form of the morphemes *wolf*, *fox* and *dog* which tells us anything about the relations between their meanings, and that therefore the description of the latter is a problem for the zoologist rather than for the linguist... he notes that a linguist, when he has been provided by experts with a definition of the meaning of male and female, can make use of these definitions to signal that this is also what underlies the difference between *he* and *she*, *lion* and *lioness*, *gander* and *goose*, and *ram* and *ewe*... – an observation that describes the principles of componential analysis in a nutshell. Extrapolating these aspects of Bloomfield’s approach, Eugene Nida (1951) developed a structuralist terminology for meaning description. Even though Nida did not yet mention componential analysis (of which, however, he would later become one of the champions), his terminology reveals how semantic theory was developed following the model of structuralist phonology (Geeraerts 2009: 70–71).

Componential analysis deals with individual meanings. In its classical form, componential analysis works on the assumption that word-meaning is not an un-analysable whole, but it can be decomposed into elementary semantic

34 Kreidler, 2002: 87 and Wardhaugh, 1977: 163 apud Susana Widyastuti, *Componential analysis of meaning: theory and applications*. Downloaded from: [staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../componential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf](http://staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../componential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf). 4.

components. It is assumed, however, that these basic semantic elements which might be called semantic features can be classified into several subtypes, thus ultimately constituting a highly structured system.

In other words, it is assumed that any item can be described in terms of categories arranged in a hierarchical way; that is, a subsequent category is a subcategory of the previous category.

The most inclusive categories are parts of speech – the major word classes are nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs. All members of a major class share a distinguishing semantic feature and involve a certain type of semantic information.... – semantic features which are present also in the lexical meaning of other words and distinguishers – semantic features which are individual, i.e. which do not recur in the lexical meaning of other words. Thus, the distinction between markers and distinguishers is that markers refer to features which the item has in common with other items, distinguishers refer to what differentiates an item from other items.... Thus, the componential analysis may be represented as a hierarchical structure with several subcategories each of which stands in relation of subordination to the preceding subclass of semantic features” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 256).

The meanings of a lexical element display three levels of structure, starting from a basic significative nucleus, a *semantic constant*, also called *root meaning*. “Componential Analysis assumes that all meanings can be further analysed into distinctive semantic features called *semes*, *semantic components* or *semantic primitives*, as the ultimate components of meaning.”<sup>35</sup>

The set of kinship terms was among the first lexical subsystems to be submitted to componential analysis:

*father* [+male][+direct line] [+older generation]  
*mother* [-male][+direct line] [+older generation]  
*son* [+male][+direct line] [-older generation]  
*daughter* [-male][+direct line] [-older generation]  
*uncle* [+male][-direct line] [+older generation]  
*aunt* [-male] [-direct line] [+older generation]  
*nephew* [+male] [-direct line] [-older generation]  
*niece* [-male] [-direct line] [-older generation].<sup>36</sup>

The method was fruitfully applied in the study of other terms based on hierarchy, such as colour terminology, military ranks, etc.

The meaning of a word can be thought of as the sum of its semantic properties. The semantic properties can be expressed in terms of semantic features: the crucial distinguishing features of the meanings of nouns are: [HUMAN] [MALE] [ADULT] [ANIMATE] [COUNTABLE].

35 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

36 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

Other authors provide another set of semantic features for componential analysis:

e.g. Some important semantic features for nouns:

[±COMMON] *teacher* vs. *Volker*

[±COUNT] *town* vs. *sand*

[±CONCRETE] *butter* vs. *commitment*

[±ANIMATE] *pig* vs. *ham*

[±HUMAN] *student* vs. *elephant*

[±MALE] (or [±FEMALE]) *bull* vs. *cow*

[±COLLECTIVE] *player* vs. *team*

Some important features for verbs: [±STATIVE] [±DURATIVE] [±TELIC] [±VOLUNTARY].<sup>37</sup>

These features are based on the taxonomy of verb types:



Verbs differ in whether they are stative or dynamic. Stative verbs describe situations or states of affairs which are stable or unchanging:

e.g. *John is a lazy boy.*

*Jane is a beautiful woman.*

Stative verbs allow the speaker to view a situation as steady and relatively unchanging. There is no reference to an explicit endpoint and there is no reference to change:

e.g. *Mary knows Greek.* (stative)

*Mary learned Greek.* (dynamic)

Dynamic verbs describe situations or states of affairs which are dynamic, changing over time:

e.g. *Harold is driving across Europe.*

*I ate pizza last night.*

Dynamic verb types are further classified into sub-types: durative vs. punctual, whether the situation described by the verb lasts for a period of time or not:

e.g. *John winked.* (punctual)

*John slept.* (durative)

– durative: e.g. *bake, walk, sleep*. Durative verbs further subdivide into: telic (resultative): *bake a cake* and atelic: *look at the sky*.

37 Brinton 143–147 apud Florian Haas, *Introduction to linguistics – basic questions, concepts and methods*. Downloaded from: [http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207\\_SemI.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207_SemI.pdf) and [userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208\\_SemII.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208_SemII.pdf). 1.and staff.um.edu.mt/albert.gatt/.../semLecture11.ppt...

Telic or resultative durative verbs describe situations with a natural endpoint:

e.g. *She baked a meat pie.* (During the process, the meat pie does not exist, it is the result of the process.)

Inchoative verbs describe situations which give rise to a new state:

e.g. *The leaves turned brown.* (At the start of the process, the leaves are not brown, the state of *being brown* is the outcome of the process.)

Telic/resultative means that a verb describes a situation with a natural endpoint or result, outcome: e.g. *He built a house.* Atelicity does not imply a result: e.g. *I looked out over the mountains.*

– punctual: e.g. *wink, explode, flash.* Punctual verbs have a subtype called semelfactive verbs. Semelfactive punctual verbs are inherently punctual, they tend to describe situations which are very brief: e.g. *wink, blink, flash, shoot, knock, sneeze, cough.*

We use square brackets to indicate semantic features. The determination of such features is called *componential analysis*. Definitions can be made somewhat more sophisticated through binary features; instead of [MALE] and [FEMALE], the labels can be [+MALE] and [-MALE] (or [-FEMALE] and [+FEMALE]), and instead of [ADULT] and [CHILD] we may have [+ADULT] and [-ADULT] (or [-CHILD] and [+CHILD]) (Kreidler 1998: 87).

Componential analysis or semantic feature analysis tries to equate a word's intension with an abstract concept consisting of smaller components called semantic features. A word's intension is practically the concept that the word evokes, or the properties or qualities connoted by it. For instance, the intension of the noun *dog* is the concept of *dog-ness* evoked, brought to mind by the word (i.e. the qualities of four-legged, furry animal, guardian of the house, man's best friend, most popular pet, etc.)

Categories or word meanings are defined in terms of necessary and sufficient features (the features are necessary in that no entity which does not possess the full set is a member of the category, and they are sufficient in that possession of all the features guarantees membership). Componential analysis is effective when it comes to representing similarities and differences among words with related meanings. It allows us to group entities into *natural classes* (similar to phonology); e.g. *man* and *woman* are in a class defined by the features [+HUMAN, +ADULT].<sup>38</sup>

Semantic feature analysis or componential analysis allows us:

- a) to describe meaning objectively and rigorously;
- b) to distinguish the meanings of words which are very close (e.g. *woman, girl*);

<sup>38</sup> Florian Haas, *Introduction to linguistics – basic questions, concepts and methods*. Downloaded from: [http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207\\_SemI.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207_SemI.pdf) and [userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208\\_SemII.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208_SemII.pdf). 2.

c) to define semantic classes, i.e. groups of words that share one or more features;

d) to identify semantic oddities, account for acceptable and non-acceptable combinations.<sup>39</sup>

The features may be written with capital letters [MALE] or lower case letters [male]; '+' stands for presence of the feature, '-' stands for absence of the feature, and square brackets are more common than other types of brackets. Componential analysis is a method

typical of structural semantics which analyses the structure of a word's meaning. Structural semantics and CA were patterned on the phonological methods of the Prague School, which described sounds by determining the absence and presence of features. ... CA is particularly applicable to distinguishing the meanings of lexemes that are semantically related or in the same semantic domain. It is often seen as a process of breaking down the sense of a word into its minimal distinctive features; that is, into components which contrast with other components. It refers to the description of the meaning of words through structured sets of semantic features, which are given as "present", "absent" or "indifferent with reference to feature". To describe the presence and absence of a feature, binary rules are used. The symbol '+' means the feature is present, while '-' means the feature is absent.<sup>40</sup>

Binary oppositions frequently have *marked* and *unmarked* terms.

That is, the terms are not entirely of equivalent weight, but one (the unmarked) is neutral or positive in contrast to the other. Markedness is definable as a relation between form and meaning: if two words contrast on a single dimension of meaning, the unmarked one is the one which can also apply neutrally to the whole dimension. A positive-negative bias is inherent to the semantic opposition. Often the marked term is indicated by a negative suffix or prefix: *happy-unhappy*, *useful-useless*. People tend to respond more quickly to unmarked than to marked terms. This could be explained by their tendency to look on the bright side of life and associate unmarkedness with 'good' evaluations and markedness with 'bad' ones.<sup>41</sup>

This procedure is a way of analysing meaning in terms of semantic features. Features such as +animate, -animate; +human, -human; +male, -male, for example, can be treated as the basic features involved in differentiating the meanings of each word in the language from every other word from a feature analysis of the noun (N) *man* = [+HUMAN, +MALE, +ADULT]. One can say

39 Kiki Nikiforidou, *Semantics*. Downloaded from: <http://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/ENL188/Intro%20I%20-outline%202.pdf>

40 Susana Widyastuti, *Componential analysis of meaning: theory and applications*. Downloaded from: [staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf](http://staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf). 5.

41 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

that at least part of the basic meaning of the word *man* in English involves the components [+HUMAN, +MALE, +ADULT].

e.g. *The N is reading a good book* is not anomalous because N = [+HUMAN].

“This approach then gives us the ability to predict what nouns would make the above sentence semantically odd. Examples would be *table*, or *tree*, or *dog* because they all have the feature (-human)” (Yule 1996: 116).

A word or lexeme presents a complex semantic structure. A lexeme is built up of smaller components of meaning which are combined differently to form a different lexeme.... “A lexeme can be analyzed and described in terms of its semantic components, which help to define different lexical relations, grammatical and syntactic processes.

The semantic structure of a lexeme is treated as a system of meanings. To some extent, we can define a lexeme by telling what set it belongs to and how it differs from other members of the same set.”<sup>42</sup>

Componential analysis is based on the presumption that the meaning of a word is composed of semantic components. So, the essential features that form the meaning are elementary units on semantic level. By componential analysis, it is possible to state the smallest indivisible units of lexis or minimal components.<sup>43</sup>

The common feature of meaning of the set is called the *root meaning*. It defines the semantic area which is analysed by the units of the field. The words in the field will be arranged into contrastive sets along different dimensions of meaning.<sup>44</sup>

The majority of the approaches to the analysis of meaning tend to assume that the meanings of most words are complex and can be described as being formed by different meaning components or semantic features.

Very often we can identify parts of meanings of words which are the same; that is, we can identify groups of words whose meanings overlap to a certain degree. These ‘overlaps’ are the parts of meaning which all these words share. At the same time, we sometimes can identify how two words are different. For example, *man* and *woman* share part of their meaning: we could capture this by saying that they are both [HUMAN]. At the same time, they are also different: what makes them different is gender; the first one is [MALE] and the second [FEMALE]. This suggests therefore an agenda of how to proceed: we can analyze the meaning of a word or expression by identifying those components that are shared by several groups, and then by identifying the parts of meaning that distinguish one

42 Susana Widyastuti, *Componential analysis of meaning: theory and applications*. Downloaded from: [staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf](http://staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf). 2.

43 Susana Widyastuti, *Componential analysis of meaning: theory and applications*. Downloaded from: [staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf](http://staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf). 4.

44 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/iddl/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/iddl/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)



word from the next one, and perhaps, by saying something about the way in which those components are combined.<sup>45</sup>

As it has been mentioned previously, when applying a feature analysis to semantics, the meaning components are called semantic features (but they have many more names: semes, semantic components, semantic markers, semantic primes). So, for example, *girl*, *woman*, *sister*, *wife*, and *queen* all share one semantic feature, which could be called [FEMALE], while *boy*, *man*, *brother*, *husband*, and *king* would share the feature [MALE].

The features [MALE] and [FEMALE] are also complementary: that means that we do not need them both, since the presence of one of them implies the absence of the other. We could also say that these features are *binary*. We just need one of them and add a '+' or '-' sign to indicate one or the other. Therefore, [+MALE] is the same thing as [-FEMALE], and [+FEMALE] is the same as [-MALE]. Which of the two features one uses is, to a certain extent, arbitrary. Nonetheless, it is often the case that theories try to decide which is the most basic feature, or use the notion of *markedness* to decide which one to use. The most normal or basic one is the less *marked* one, and that is the one chosen.

One of the advantages of feature analysis is that it supplies an easy and transparent method of capturing the meaning structure (similarities and differences) of groups of words by combining the use of several semantic features. Semantic features thus allow us to capture in an economical, compact and highly explicit way semantic relationships such as hyponymy or incompatibility.<sup>46</sup>

The conceptual meaning of *woman* is said to be 'adult human female'.

Or, to put it more formally, [+HUMAN, -MALE, +ADULT], or, equivalently, [+HUMAN, +FEMALE, +ADULT]. These are said to be the features or components of the meanings of the words. All words consist semantically of combinations of features. It is sometimes claimed that there is a universal set of semantic features: the differences between individual languages being a matter of differences between the particular combinations of features which they represent as words. One purpose of semantic feature analysis is to provide a formal characterization of the various meaning-relations.<sup>47</sup>

45 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 2.

46 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 3.

47 Nigel Love, *Translational semantics: a discussion of the second edition of Geoffrey Leech's Semantics: the study of meaning*, Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics, Vol. 11, 1983, 115–136; DOI: 10.5774/11-0-106, downloaded from: [www.ajol.info/index.php/spl/article/view-File/116499/106044](http://www.ajol.info/index.php/spl/article/view-File/116499/106044). 124.



For instance, the componential analysis of the word *spinster* runs as: noun, count noun, human, adult, female, who has never married.

*Noun*, of course, is the part of speech, meaning the most inclusive category; *count-noun* is a marker, it represents a subclass within nouns and refers to the semantic feature which the word *spinster* has in common with all other countable nouns (*boy, table, flower, idea*, etc.) but which distinguishes it from all uncountable nouns, e.g. *salt, bread, water*, etc; *human* is also a marker which refers the word *spinster* to a subcategory of countable nouns, i.e. to nouns denoting human beings; *adult* is another marker pointing at a specific subdivision of human beings into adults & young or not grown-up. The word *spinster* possesses still another marker – *female* – which it shares with such words as *woman, widow, mother*, etc., and which represents a subclass of adult females. At last comes the distinguisher *who has never married* which differentiates the meaning of the word from other words which have all other common semantic features” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 256).

Componential analysis brings to light the set of semes which make up the denotational meaning of lexical units. “To some extent we can define a lexeme by telling what set it belongs to and how it differs from other members of the same set” (Kreidler 1998: 87).

## The advantages of componential analysis

The advantage of componential analysis is that it reflects the system through which lexemes have their respective senses. “To tell what something is requires us to tell what it is not, what it contrasts with and what feature or features make the contrast possible” (Kreidler 1998: 89).

Componential analysis has a useful part to play in contributing to the description of meanings of lexemes. Here are some of the contributions:

a. Understanding synonymy.

A pair of true synonyms will share the same set of semantic components. For example, *adult* and *grown-up* have the same components [+HUMAN] [+ADULT].

b. Establishing degrees of synonymy.

We may talk of looser synonymy where a pair of lexemes have some but not all semantic components in common. For example, *barn* and *shed* would be looser synonyms. They share components [BUILDING], [STORAGE], but *barn* has the additional component of [FARM] and perhaps that of [FOR CEREALS], while *shed* has perhaps the additional component [HOUSE].

c. Understanding antonymy.

A pair of antonyms usually share all their components except one, e.g. *man* and *woman* share the components [+CONCRETE], [+ANIMATE], [+HUMAN], but they are contrasted by the component [MALE].

d. Understanding the sense relation of hyponymy.

Hyponymy refers to the relation of inclusion of meaning, e.g. the fact that the meaning of *rat* is included in the meaning of *rodent*.

e. Helping translators to produce accurate translations.

CA determines the essential features of meaning of lexical units, which is very useful in doing translation.<sup>48</sup>

We can now define certain sense relations more precisely by making use of semantic features: synonymy: two words have exactly the same features; oppositeness: two words share the same features except for one feature of word 1 being [+] and the same feature of word 2 being [-]; hyponymy: word 1 is a hyponym of word 2 if the meaning of word 1 contains all the features of word 2 but not vice versa.<sup>49</sup>

## Disadvantages of componential analysis

Problems of binary semantic features may be the following:

a) functional morphemes (e.g. *the*, *a*, *and*, etc.);

b) abstract concepts (e.g. *love*, *hate*, *satisfaction*, etc.);

c) common (very frequent) support verbs, e.g. *keep*, *take*, *put*, etc.<sup>50</sup> Other authors mention other weaknesses.

The first and most immediate one is that only certain types of words can be fruitfully analyzed using this method. It works with kinship terms, terms referring to male/female/ young/adult animals or humans, and a few more. The great majority of words cannot be analyzed in this way... In distinguishing between different types of words, it is quite easy to come up with trivial (and inane) feature analysis: to distinguish between the animal terms *bear*, *pig*, *rabbit*, *tiger*, *donkey*, *kangaroo*, we could supply the features [±BEAR], [±PIG], [±RABBIT], [±TIGER], [±DONKEY], [±KANGAROO]. Each animal would have a positive value of its own feature and a negative value of the rest. Sometimes this analysis is disguised by having features which are almost 'synonyms' of the word to be analyzed, resulting in

48 Nida apud Susana Widyastuti, *Componential analysis of meaning: theory and applications*. Downloaded from: [staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compentia%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf](http://staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compentia%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf). 10–11.

49 Florian Haas, *Introduction to linguistics – basic questions, concepts and methods*. Downloaded from: [http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207\\_SemI.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207_SemI.pdf) and [userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208\\_SemII.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208_SemII.pdf). 1.

50 Kiki Nikiforidou, *Semantics*. Downloaded from: <http://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/ENL188/Intro%20II%20-outline%202.pdf>

tautological analyses. Thus, *horses* are [+EQUINE] and *dogs* are [+CANINE]. This is obviously not an efficient way of analyzing meaning, since it is tautological, and runs into many problems. First, saying that a tiger has the feature [+TIGER] does not really add much to our knowledge of the word; it just repeats its name (the same happens with the horses–equine and dogs–canine examples). Then, saying that a *tiger* is also [-BEAR], [-PIG], [-RABBIT], [-DONKEY], [-KANGAROO] again does not tell us much about the meaning of the word. Also, the list could be infinite (there are so many things that a tiger is not: a rat, a bird, a fish, a table, a person, an ice-cream, and so on). In general, features should not be *ad-hoc*, that is established to solve a particular, individual problem; and this restricts their use only to groups of words with features that overlap. Another issue in semantic feature analysis concerns the nature of the semantic features themselves. What is a semantic feature? Are they *primitives* or can they be decomposed into finer distinctions? Which is the level of granularity that will prove adequate for semantic analysis? This is a controversial issue and there are different answers supplied by different scholars.

As a conclusion, binary semantic features can be used to explain certain phenomena, but there are a number of shortcomings that have been identified:

- Only a limited range of lexemes can be analyzed (e.g. verbs are difficult to analyze with this approach);
- There are meaning residues which cannot be analyzed (e.g. you cannot capture *all* aspects of a word using binary features);
- Most kinds of meaning relations cannot be analyzed with binary features;
- Binary semantic feature analyses depend to a certain extent on the subjectivity of the analyst.<sup>51</sup>

Componential analysis is also limited in its range of applicability as it does not apply easily to all areas of the vocabulary (conjunctions). Some words are also culture-bound, which means the meaning distinctions that are relevant to one culture may not fit another culture at all (kinship terms, different rankings). Componential analysis (among other types of meaning) only focuses on referential meaning. Not all the words have referents and meaning is often context-dependent (*friend, male or female*).

It works best with taxonomies (systems of classification, e.g. kinship) or sets of concrete objects. It is of more doubtful value in describing the meanings of more abstract lexemes, not least because we lack an adequate metalanguage. Consider the set of lexemes: *annoy, irritate, vex, displease*, and *provoke*. They all refer to the ways of causing someone to be angry or to feel angry; any member of the set is frequently defined in terms of one or more of the members. We may conclude therefore that there

51 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/lingoing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 4–5.

is no universal set of semantic components from which the meanings of lexemes are composed.<sup>52</sup>

A possible disadvantage of componential analysis, though not a necessary one, is that we may find ourselves “unduly concerned with classification of the phenomena represented in language, forgetting that our concern is language itself” (Kreidler 1998: 89).

According to Haas,<sup>53</sup> the following weaknesses can be mentioned:

- Circularity: it is argued that semantic features are abstractions that underlie the actual words of a language, but in fact the features ARE words of the language.
- No one has yet determined a complete list of features which are needed to analyse all the words of a language, let alone the words of all languages.
- In any particular use of a word, only some of the postulated features may be relevant.
- Semantic features are binary, but binary features are not always the best way of analysing a semantic field.
- There is no evidence that semantic features have any psychological reality.
- There are fuzzy concepts. (How much does one have to be worth to be called *rich*? Consider also *old*, *tall*, *grey-haired*, *genius*, *clean*).
- Membership in a category can be graded: A robin is a *better* bird than a penguin. In the classical model of componential analysis all members are equal.

Componential analysis is considered by some linguists as a useful technique for understanding the meaning relations among words. At the same time, G. Leech tried to comment on the main criticisms:

1. It is said that componential analysis (CA) accounts for only some parts of a language’s vocabulary (those parts which are *neatly organized*).
2. It is often objected that CA suffers from a *vicious circle* in that it merely explains one set of symbols (e.g. English words) by another set of symbols (which also turned out to be English words). The notation of symbols is arbitrary and the explanatory function of features is solely their role in the prediction of basic statements.
3. Another objection is that CA postulates abstract semantic entities (semantic features) unnecessarily. But the notation of CA is *language-neutral*, and so the same features, oppositions, redundancy rules may explain meaning relation in many different languages.

52 Susana Widyastuti, *Componential analysis of meaning: theory and applications*. Downloaded from: [staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf](http://staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf). 14.

53 Florian Haas, *Introduction to linguistics – basic questions, concepts and methods*. Downloaded from: [http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207\\_SemI.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207_SemI.pdf) and [userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208\\_SemII.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208_SemII.pdf). 2.

4. Connected to that, it has been postulated that CA implies universal features of meaning, and therefore relies on the strong assumption that the same semantic features are found in all languages. CA fits in well with a weak universalist position whereby semantic oppositions are regarded as *language-neutral*, i.e. as *conceptual contrasts* not necessarily tied to the description of particular languages. Semantic analyses may be generalized from one language to another, but only to the extent that this is justified by *translation equivalence*.

5. It has also been claimed that CA is unexplanatory in that it does not provide for the interpretation of semantic features in terms of the real-world properties and objects that they refer to. For example, + *ADULT* remains an abstract uninterpreted symbol unless we can actually specify what adults are like, i.e. how we decide when the feature + *ADULT* refers to something. To expect CA to provide an interpretation in this sense is to expect it to provide a theory not only of *meaning* but of *reference*, or not only of conceptual meaning but also of connotative meaning. CA cannot have this wider goal: it is meant to explain word sense, not the encyclopedic knowledge which must enter into a theory of reference.

6. The view that word-meanings are essentially vague, that determinate criteria for the reference of words cannot be given has received prominent support in philosophy and linguistics. Wittgenstein exemplified this with the word *game*: he could find no essential defining features of what constitutes a *game* and concluded that we know the meaning by virtue of recognizing certain family resemblances between the activities it refers to. A more recent critique of the deterministic view of meaning is given by Labov (1973), who conducted an experiment in which subjects were invited to label pictures of more-or-less cup-like objects. There was a core of agreement as to what constituted a cup, but there was also a peripheral gradient of disagreement and uncertainty. The conclusion is that *cup*, *mug*, *bowl* and similar words are defined in terms of 'fuzzy sets of attributes', that is *sets of attributes of varying importance*, rather than in terms of a clear-cut, unvarying set of features. We match candidates for 'cuphood' against a *prototype* or *standard notion of cup*. The vagueness is referential and does not affect componential analysis because it has to do with category recognition: the mental encyclopedia rather than the mental dictionary.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, one way of studying lexical meaning is componential analysis, which is a kind of a contrastive analysis, based on the binary opposition of semantic features. Contrastive analysis refers to analysing the contexts into which different words – related in meaning – may or may not enter. As we have seen so far, the meaning of any word depends to a great extent on the place it occupies in the set of

semantically related words: its synonyms, the constituents of the lexical field the word belongs to, and other members of the word-family which the word enters.

Different aspects of this quality are differently distributed among the words making up the synonymic set. This absence of one-to-one correspondence can be also observed if we compare the constituents of the same lexico-semantic group in different languages. Thus, difference in the lexical meaning (or meanings) of correlated words accounts for the difference of their collocability in different languages (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 238–239).

In this sense, in the English synonymic set *brave, courageous, bold, fearless, audacious, valiant, valorous, doughty, undaunted, and intrepid*, each word differs in certain component of meaning from the others: *brave* usually implies resolution and self-control in meeting without inspiring fear, *courageous* stresses stout-heartedness and firmness of temper, *bold* implies a temperamental liking for danger: each term will enter into different context and different collocations (we are not very likely to say something like *My cat was pretty valiant when she met your dog*).

Componential analysis is founded on the notion of semantic contrast: the units of a field are assumed to contrast simultaneously on different dimensions of meaning. The common feature of meaning of the set is called the *root meaning*. It defines the semantic area which is analysed by the units of the field. The words in the field will be arranged into contrastive sets along different dimensions of meaning.<sup>55</sup>

Last but not least, componential contrastive analysis deals with the meaning and use of situational verbal units, i.e. words, word groups, or sentences which are commonly used by native speakers in certain situations. For instance, when we answer a telephone call and hear somebody asking for a person whose name we have never heard, the usual answer for the Hungarian speaker would be *Tévedés* or *Téves hívás*. The Englishman in identical situation is likely to say *Wrong number*.

Finally, here are some examples of typical componential analyses:<sup>56</sup>

Semantic feature analysis or componential analysis of the underlined nouns from the sentences a–t:

- (a) *Have you made plans for tonight?* plans [+COMMON] [+COUNT] [–CONCRETE] [–COLLECTIVE]
- (b) *He had the flu last week.* flu [+COMMON] [–COUNT] [–CONCRETE] [–COLLECTIVE]
- (c) *The group made its way through the forest.* group [+COMMON] [+COUNT] [+CONCRETE]
- (d) *He has a very healthy appetite.* appetite [+COMMON] [–COUNT] [–CONCRETE]

55 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

56 Based on Laurel J. Brinton, *The Structure of Modern English Workbook*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Downloaded from: <https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/iverson/www/docs/6.pdf>. 130.

- (e) *We have managed to stay within our budget.* budget [+COMMON] [+COUNT] [-CONCRETE] [-COLLECTIVE]
- (f) *She spilled the coffee grounds on the floor.* grounds [+COMMON] [-COUNT] [+CONCRETE] [-ANIMATE] [+COLLECTIVE]
- (g) *Have you any grounds for making such a claim?* grounds [+COMMON] [-COUNT] [-CONCRETE] [-COLLECTIVE]
- (h) *After the long boat trip, it felt good to stand on solid ground.* ground [+COMMON] [-COUNT] [+CONCRETE] [-ANIMATE] [-COLLECTIVE]
- (i) *Do you like seafood?* seafood [+COMMON] [-COUNT] [+CONCRETE] [+ANIMATE] [-HUMAN] [+COLLECTIVE]
- (j) *My grandparents are coming for visit.* grandparents [+COMMON] [+COUNT] [+ANIMATE] [+HUMAN] [±MALE] [-COLLECTIVE]
- (k) *A herd of caribou crossed the road.* herd [+COMMON] [+COUNT] [+CONCRETE] [+ANIMATE] [-HUMAN] [±MALE] [+COLLECTIVE]
- (l) *Our vacation begins next week.* vacation [+COMMON] [+COUNT] [-CONCRETE] [-COLLECTIVE]
- (m) *She has symptoms of the flu.* symptoms [+COMMON] [+COUNT] [+CONCRETE] [-ANIMATE] or [-COUNT] [+COLLECTIVE]
- (n) *You should take responsibility for the planning.* responsibility [+COMMON] [-COUNT] [-CONCRETE] [-COLLECTIVE]
- (o) *The scenery here is so beautiful.* scenery [+COMMON] [-COUNT] [+CONCRETE] [-COLLECTIVE]
- (p) *Where is the receiver?* receiver [+COMMON] [+COUNT] [+CONCRETE] [-ANIMATE] [-COLLECTIVE] or [+ANIMATE] [±HUMAN] [±MALE]
- (q) *My clothes need to be ironed.* clothes [+COMMON] [-COUNT] [+CONCRETE] [-ANIMATE] [+COLLECTIVE]
- (r) *The doctor prescribed bed rest.* bed rest [+COMMON] [-COUNT] [-CONCRETE] [-COLLECTIVE]
- (s) *The scissors are missing.* scissors [+COMMON] [-COUNT] [+CONCRETE] [-ANIMATE] [-COLLECTIVE]
- (t) *Are there any requirements for this course?* requirements [+COMMON] [+COUNT] [-CONCRETE] [-COLLECTIVE]
- Semantic feature analysis or componential analysis of the underlined verbs from the sentences (using the inherent verbal features [±STATIVE] [±DURATIVE] [±TELIC] [±VOLUNTARY]):
- (a) *The skaters are practising.* [-STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [-TELIC] [+VOLUNTARY]
- (b) *She skated around the rink.* [-STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [+TELIC] [+VOLUNTARY]
- (c) *She skates gracefully.* [+STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [-TELIC] [-VOLUNTARY]
- (d) *She bumped into another skater.* [-STATIVE] [-DURATIVE] [+TELIC] [±VOLUNTARY]



(bumping may be either intentional or not)

(e) *He polished her skates for her.* [-STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [+TELIC]  
[+VOLUNTARY]

(f) *Pam has a cold.* [+STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [-TELIC] [-VOLUNTARY]

(g) *Pam has recently recovered from her illness.* [-STATIVE] [+DURATIVE]  
[+TELIC] [-VOLUNTARY]

(h) *Pam caught a cold last week.* [-STATIVE] [-DURATIVE] [+TELIC]  
[-VOLUNTARY]

(i) *Pam was coughing loudly.* [-STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [-TELIC]  
[-VOLUNTARY]

(Presumably, coughing is involuntary in this case, though in *He coughed to catch her attention*, it is voluntary.)

(j) *Pam cured herself with large doses of vitamin C.* [-STATIVE] [+DURATIVE]  
[+TELIC] [+VOLUNTARY]

(k) *Charles and Julia got married yesterday.* [-STATIVE] [-DURATIVE] [+TELIC]  
[+VOLUNTARY]

(l) *The ceremony lasted an hour.* [-STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [+TELIC]  
[-VOLUNTARY]

(m) *They have been engaged for a long time.* [+STATIVE] [+DURATIVE]  
[-TELIC] [-VOLUNTARY]

(Engagement might seem [+TELIC] since it leads up to marriage, but even if marriage does not take place, the couple can be said to have been engaged.)

(n) *Julia's mother was crying.* [-STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [-TELIC]  
[-VOLUNTARY]

(o) *He studied for the test.* [-STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [+TELIC] [+VOLUNTARY]

(p) *The test began at 9:00.* [-STATIVE] [-DURATIVE] [+TELIC] [-VOLUNTARY]

(q) *While studying, he drank lots of coffee.* [-STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [-TELIC]  
[+VOLUNTARY]

(r) *He is happy with the results.* [+STATIVE] [+DURATIVE] [-TELIC]  
[-VOLUNTARY]

(s) *After the exam, he got drunk.* [-STATIVE] [-DURATIVE] [+TELIC]  
[-VOLUNTARY]

(Although drinking (to excess) is voluntary and durative, getting drunk is not really voluntary but is a change of state that simply happens.)





## SEMANTIC RELATIONS

F. de Saussure established four major types of associations among lexical items:

- Etymological – based on resemblances in form and meaning;
- Derivational – based on identity of affixes;
- Semantic – based on meaning relations;
- Formal – based on accidental form resemblances.<sup>57</sup>

Traditional lexicology deals with types of lexical relations established considering distinctions similar to those belonging to Saussure's conception:

- semantic ties – based on the signification of words; such ties result in synonymic and antonymic series of words;
- morpho-semantic ties obtaining among lexical items derived from a common basic element; they result in word families;
- syntagmatic ties obtaining among lexical items as they occur in actual utterance; syntagmatic ties may be divided into free relations among *sit* and *chair/table/down*, etc. and stereotype relations among lexical items part of set idioms and phrases, *as a matter of fact*, *as mad as a hatter*, *day and night*, etc.;
- phonetic ties based on similarities of phonic substance, *town-down*.<sup>58</sup>

Since semantics has become an independent field of study, the attention shifted to what we generally call *semantic ties*, *sense relations*, or *semantic relations*. Semantic relations (sometimes also called lexical relations) are connected with how lexemes are associated with other lexemes. When dealing with meaning, the simplest taxonomy that comes to mind is that there is connotational meaning and there is denotational meaning.

Meaning is more than denotation and connotation. As Kreidler puts it:

what a word means depends in part on its associations with other words, the relational aspect. Lexemes do not merely 'have' meanings; they contribute meanings to the utterances in which they occur, and what meanings they contribute depends on what other lexemes they are associated with in these utterances. The meaning that a lexeme has because of these relationships is the *sense* of that lexeme (Kreidler 1998: 46).

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57 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

58 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

E.g. a *library* is a collection of books (*Professor Jones has a rather large library*) and is also a building that houses a collection of books. This aspect of meaning does not affect only nouns, as other parts of speech are involved too. Adjectives, too, can have different senses. “If you come across some object which you have never seen before, and you wonder about its origin and its purpose, we can say that you are *curious* about it. But we can also call the object a *curious* kind of thing” (Kreidler 1998: 48).

Lexical relations are a basic characteristic of language usage. The importance of this aspect is emphasized by Yule in the following way:

Not only can words be treated as ‘containers’ or as fulfilling ‘roles’, they can also have ‘relationships’. In everyday talk, we frequently give the meanings of words in terms of their relationships. If you were asked to give the meaning of the word *conceal*, for example, you might simply reply “it’s the same as *hide*”, or give the meaning of *shallow* as “the opposite of *deep*”, or the meaning of *daffodil* as “it’s a kind of *flower*”. In doing so, you are characterizing the meaning of a word not in terms of its component features, but in terms of its relationship to other words. This procedure has also been used in the semantic description of languages and is treated as the analysis of lexical relations (Yule 1996: 118).

## Syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations

Not only words or lexemes have meanings. What is more, a lexeme does not merely *have* meaning (as if meaning were something granted). The meaning of a lexeme is, in part, its relation to other lexemes of the language. Each lexeme is linked in some way to numerous other lexemes of the language. Thus, this way we notice two above mentioned kinds of linkage, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. But what do these terms actually mean?

Syntagmatic relations refer to the combination of lexemes into superior sequences (e.g. *He + got + a + letter*), whereas paradigmatic relations are linked to the choices we make when construing sentences (e.g. *He got/received a letter*).

First, there is the relation of the lexeme with other lexemes with which it occurs in the same phrases or sentences, in the way that *arbitrary* can co-occur with *judge*, *happy* with *child* or with *accident*, *sit* with *chair*, *read* with *book* or *newspaper*. These are syntagmatic relations, the mutual association of two or more words in a sequence (not necessarily right next to one another) so that the meaning of each is affected by the other(s) and together their meanings contribute to the meaning of the larger unit, the phrase or sentence.

Another kind of relation is contrastive. Instead of saying *The judge was arbitrary*, for instance, we can say *The judge was cautious* or *careless*, or

*busy* or *irritable*, and so on with numerous other possible descriptors. This is a paradigmatic relation, a relation of choice.

We choose from among a number of possible words that can fill the same blank: the words may be similar in meaning or have little in common, but each is different from the others (Kreidler 1998: 48).

Syntagmatic relations define the meaning the word possesses when it is used in combination with other words in the flow of speech. For example, compare the meaning of the verb to get in *He got a letter*, *He got tired*, *He got to London* and *He could not get the piano through the door*.

Paradigmatic relations are those that exist between individual lexical items which make up one of the subgroups of vocabulary items, e.g. sets of synonyms, lexico-semantic groups, etc.

Paradigmatic relations define the word-meaning through its interrelation with other members of the subgroup in question. For example, the meaning of the verb *to get* can be fully understood only in comparison with other items of the synonymic set: *get*, *obtain*, *receive*, etc. *He got a letter*, *he received a letter*, *he obtained a letter*, etc. Comparing the sentences discussed above, we may conclude that an item in a sentence can be usually substituted by one or more than one other items that have identical part-of-speech meaning and similar though not identical lexical meaning (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 46).

**Table 1.**

		Syntagmatic relations →			
Paradigmatic relations ↓	He	got	a	letter.	
	I	received	a	note.	
	She	obtained	an	epistle.	
				etc.	

Source: Ginzburg et alii 1979: 47

Still, it must be noticed that a full understanding of the semantic structure of any lexical item can be gained only from the study of a variety of contexts in which the word is used, the context determining each individual meaning of the word. "The semantic structure of the word has an objective existence as a dialectical entity which embodies dialectical permanency and variability. The context individualises the meanings, brings them out. The meaning or meanings representative of the semantic structure of the word and least dependent on

context are usually described as free or denominative meanings (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 48).

How are the words of a language organized? Intralinguistic relations of words are basically of these two main types mentioned above: syntagmatic and paradigmatic (syntagmatic relations = the ways words combine and collocate, whereas paradigmatic relations = the way in which words can substitute for each other).

Among the most important paradigmatic semantic relations we include: synonymy (two words have the same meaning in a number of contexts: *holidays/vacations*), antonymy (lexemes contrast in semantic feature(s): *tall* vs. *small*, polysemy (lexemes can have two or more related meanings, i.e. a single word with different meanings: e.g. *bright: shining – intelligent*), homonymy (lexemes have entirely distinct meanings, i.e. separate words with same pronunciations: e.g. *bat*: flying mammal – equipment in baseball), homography (words are written identically but pronounced differently: *wind*), homophony (words are pronounced identically but written differently: *threw – through*), and hyponymy. Syntagmatic relations refer to collocations (words which tend to occur together: *fair hair, fair play*) and combinatorics.

Research on syntagmatic lexical relations has been carried out within different theoretical frameworks. Basically, we can distinguish between generative and non-generative (mostly structuralist) approaches. Within the latter, we can further separate those using a metalanguage from descriptions without semantic elements of any kind. Amongst research without metalinguistic elements, the notion of *collocation*, as developed within British linguistics, has to be particularly emphasized. The reason for this is that a number of linguists using this concept do not refer to semantic relations at all. They merely state that particular lexemes co-occur frequently.... For syntagmatic incompatibility of lexemes in the British tradition the terms *collocation restrictions* and *co-occurrence restrictions* are often used (Lipka 1992: 159).

Analysis in terms of lexical relations means to explain the meaning in terms of the relationship with other words.

## Paradigmatic relations

### Semantic equivalence and synonymy

Lexical units may also be classified by the criterion of *semantic similarity*. The terms generally used to denote this type of semantic relatedness is *synonymy*. Synonymy is often understood as semantic equivalence. Synonymy refers to

words that have the same meanings or that are closely related in meaning. These are words which sound differently, but have the same or nearly the same meaning.

E.g. *answer/reply* – *almost/nearly* – *broad/wide* – *buy/purchase* – *freedom/liberty*.

Sameness of meaning is not always total sameness: only one word would be appropriate in a sentence.

E.g. *answer* and *reply*:

*I got an answer/I got a reply.*

*Sandy only had one answer correct on the test.* (but not *reply*)

Semantic equivalence may be observed at the level of words (both among notional and function words) and word groups, word groups and sentences, sentences and sentences:

– Words and words: *to remember* – *to recall*;

– Words and word groups: *to die* – *to kick the bucket*, *to pass away*;

– Word groups: *to win a victory* – *to gain a victory*;

– Sentences and sentences: *Bill is shorter than John.* – *John is taller than Bill.*

We should keep in mind that 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. For example, whereas the word *answer* fits in the sentence *Sandy had only one answer correct on the test*, the word *reply* would sound odd. Synonymous forms may also differ in terms of formal versus informal uses. The sentence *My father purchased a large automobile* has virtually the same meaning as *My dad bought a big car*, with four synonymous replacements, but the second version sounds much more casual or informal than the first (Yule 2010: 117).

Still, some authors (cf. Ginzburg et alii 1979: 55) consider that the term *synonym* should be confined only to semantic relation between words. Similar relations between word groups and sentences should be described as *semantic equivalence*.

Levičchi (1970: 85) defines synonyms as “two or more lexical items or grammatical units comparable through their content, but reflecting in various degrees and in various senses (semantic, grammatical, stylistic) the essential notes of the notion they denote”.

Differentiation of synonyms may be observed in different semantic components – denotational or connotational, or, to be more exact, stylistic reference. Synonyms differ in formality. Thus, *buy* and *purchase* are similar in meaning but differ in their stylistic reference, and therefore are not completely interchangeable. It is only the denotational component that may be described as identical or similar. Identity of meaning is very rare even among monosemantic words. In fact, cases of complete synonymy are very few and they are generally

restricted to technical nomenclatures where we can find monosemantic terms completely identical in meaning as, for example, *spirant and fricative* in phonetics.

Thus, “synonyms are words different in sound-form but similar in their denotational meaning or meanings. Synonymous relationship is observed only between similar denotational meanings of phonemically different words” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 55).

It may often happen that words synonymous in some lexical contexts may display no synonymy whatsoever in others: e.g. *The snow in November was abnormal* and *The snow in November was exceptional* vs. *My child is exceptional* and *My child is abnormal*.

Taking all these into account, Ginzburg et alii propose the following definition of synonyms: “synonyms are words different in their sound-form, but similar in their denotational meaning or meanings and interchangeable at least in some contexts” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 55).

Synonyms are two or more forms with very closely related meanings, which are often, but not always, intersubstitutable in sentences. Examples of synonyms are the pairs *broad – wide*, *hide – conceal*, *almost – nearly*, *cab – taxi*, *liberty – freedom*, *answer – reply*.

Synonymy is the relationship between two predicates that have the same (partial) sense. In most dialects of English, *stubborn* and *obstinate* are synonyms. In many dialects, *brigand* and *bandit* are synonyms. In many dialects, *mercury* and *quicksilver* are synonyms.

Examples of perfect synonymy are hard to find, perhaps because there is little point in a dialect having two predicates with exactly the same sense. Note that our definition of synonymy requires identity of sense. This is a stricter definition than is sometimes given: sometimes synonymy is defined as similarity of meaning, a definition which is vaguer than ours. The price we pay for our rather strict definition is that very few examples of synonymy, so defined, can be found. But the strict definition is useful as an ideal and we will still use it and assume that relatively good instances of synonymy are possible for the purpose of furthering our investigation into how to describe sense relations (Hurford et alii 2007: 106).

In Modern English, quite a number of words in synonymic sets are usually of Latin or French origin. “English, because of its double-barrelled vocabulary, Germanic and Romance, seems to have numerous pairs and even trios of synonyms” (Kreidler 1998: 97).

E.g. out of thirteen words, making up the set *see, behold, descry, espy, view, survey, contemplate, observe, notice, remark, note, discern, perceive*, only *see* and *behold* are not either French or Latin borrowings.

We can mention the following patterns of synonymic sets:

– Double-scale pattern native versus Latin (e.g. *bodily – corporal, brotherly – fraternal*); native versus Greek or French (e.g. *answer – reply, fiddle – violin*);

– Triple-scale pattern e.g. native – French, and Latin, or Greek (e.g. *begin (start) – commence (Fr.) – initiate (L.); rise – mount (Fr.) – ascend (L.)* (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 57).

Yule also underlines the idea that one of the sources of synonymy is borrowing.

E.g. “Native English: *to ask, to end, to rise, teaching, belly.*

French borrowings: *to question, to finish, to mount, guidance, stomach.*

Latin borrowings: *to interrogate, to complete, to ascend, instruction, abdomen.*

... from American English, in particular, e.g. *long distance call* AE – *trunk call* BE, *radio* AE – *wireless* BE” (Yule 1996: 118).

Subjects prominent in the interests of a community tend to attract a large number of synonyms. This linguistic phenomenon is usually described as the *law of synonymic attraction* (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 57).

E.g. in *Beowulf*, there are 37 synonyms for *hero* and at least a dozen for *battle* and *fight*, 17 expressions for *sea*.

In Modern American English, there are at least twenty words used to denote *money*: *beans, bucks, the chips, wherewithal*, etc. The law of synonymic attraction and the example of *Beowulf* is mentioned by Zdrenghea (1977: 45) as well. He defines synonyms as “classes of words, homogeneous from a grammatical point of view, having different expressions but a common content meaning” (Zdrenghea 1977: 96).

When a particular word is given a transferred meaning, its synonyms tend to develop along parallel lines. This form of analogy active in the semantic development of synonyms is referred to as *radiation of synonyms*.

E.g. in early New English, the verb *overlook* was employed in the meaning of *look with an evil eye upon, cast a spell over*, from which there developed the meaning *deceive* first recorded in 1596. Exactly half a century later, *oversee* emerged as a synonym of *overlook*, employed in the meaning of *deceive*. In Modern English, both words have lost this meaning (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 57).

Two words are synonyms if they have the same meaning. “And having the same meaning means instantiating the same concept. Thus, *Islamic* and *Muslim* might be said to be synonyms, because the corresponding concept, which we can either refer to as Muslim or Islamic, is identical” (Riemer 2010: 31).

The bulk of synonyms may be referred to as *stylistically marked words*, i.e. they possess a peculiar connotational component of meaning. Many synonyms seem to possess common emotive charge: for instance, *whiteness* implies something favourable and pleasing to contemplate and so do words like *purity, clarity, cleanness, or immaculateness*.

Dictionaries typically provide a number of synonyms for at least some of the lexemes they define, and in fact there are whole dictionaries of synonyms. But synonymy is not a simple matter, for two lexemes never have the same range of syntactic occurrences, and even where they share occurrences and



make predications about the same class of referring expressions, they are likely to differ in what they suggest (Kreidler 1998: 97).

Synonymy is “the coincidence in the essential meaning of words which usually preserve their differences in connotations and stylistic characteristics. Synonyms are two or more words belonging to the same part of speech and possessing one or more identical or nearly identical denotational meanings, interchangeable in some contexts. These words are distinguished by different shades of meaning, connotations and stylistic features”.<sup>59</sup>

There are relatively few perfect synonyms since few elements can be used in absolutely all possible contexts. Synonymy is always related to context. Context sometimes may make synonyms. In the phrase *a funny story*, we can replace *funny* with the synonymous adjective *humorous*. In *a funny feeling*, a better synonym for *funny* is *peculiar*; but *humorous* and *peculiar* are not synonymous with each other. Two lexical items are perfectly synonymous in one context or in several contexts, but never in all contexts. Real synonymy is rare (e.g. *remember* – *recall*) that is why we must introduce the term *relative synonymy*. Context or the position on the syntagmatic axis is essential for synonymy.

The context-dependency of synonymy is observed by Mullany–Stockwell, who state that synonymy refers to “the ideal state in which a word means exactly the same as another. This can be said to be idealised, because in practice there are probably no true exact synonyms, since the connotations and associations of the two words are likely to be slightly different. For example, ‘book, volume, text, tome’ might all be said to be synonymous, but it is easy to see that they have specific and different normal contexts of use” (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 64).

Geeraerts defines synonymy as a relationship between words in context:

two items are synonymous if they may be substituted for each other in a given context, while retaining the semantic value of the expression as a whole. The substitution must work in both directions, to rule out hyponymous substitutions. In *Kim was fined for speeding*, a substitution to *Kim was penalized for speeding* is possible. Conversely, it is more difficult to go from *Kim was penalized for speeding* to *Kim was fined for speeding*, because the penalization may take other forms, like the withdrawal of Kim’s driver’s license. Partial synonymy between words in a context exists if substitutable items differ in some aspect of their meaning. This is particularly clear when non-denotational aspects of meaning, like emotive or stylistic shades of meaning, are at stake. Taking for granted that both words do not exhibit differences of emotive or stylistic meaning, film and picture are completely synonymous in the reading ‘cinematographic representation’ with regard to a context like *Did you see the latest – with Kate Blanchett? Movie and picture*, on the other hand, would be merely

59 Lectures on English lexicology, 2010, Lectures.on.Le\_icology1.pdf.

partially synonymous in the same context, given that the former word is more informal than the latter. Similarly, *whore* and *prostitute* may refer to the same person, but the former has a more negative charge than the latter. Such differences of stylistic or emotive meaning are often associated with specialized language: whereas *gonorrhoea* belongs to medical jargon, *clap* is the more popular (and more emotional) term. But language variation of this kind may also occur among words that are denotationally and connotationally identical in all other respects: *underground* and *subway* are only distinct to the extent that the former is typical for British English and the latter for American English (Geeraerts 2009: 81–82).

Lyons (1977) classifies synonyms into the following types:<sup>60</sup>

- absolute synonyms;
- partial synonyms;
- near synonyms.

Absolute synonyms should be *fully*, *totally* and *completely* synonymous.

Synonyms are fully synonymous if, and only if, *all their meanings are identical*.

Synonyms are totally synonyms if and only if they are synonymous *in all contexts*.

Synonyms are completely synonymous if and only if they are identical *on all relevant dimensions of meaning*.

Absolute synonyms should satisfy all the three criteria above, whereas partial synonyms should satisfy at least one criterion.

D. A. Cruse comments on Lyons' classification, arguing that *identical* and *synonymous* are to be understood as *completely synonymous*; secondly, *near synonyms* 'more or less similar, but not identical in meaning' qualify as incomplete synonyms, and therefore as *partial synonyms*, so the distinction between the two classes is not so clear as Lyons claims. Referring to absolute synonyms in language, Cruse states that there is no real motivation for their existence, and if they do exist, in time, one of them would become obsolete, or would develop a difference in semantic function. For example, *sofa* and *settee* are absolute synonyms, but at a certain point in time *sofa* had the feature /elegant/, which now seems to have disappeared from the conscience of the speakers who use the two terms in free variation. But, according to Cruse, this state of affairs would not persist since it is against the tendency towards economy manifest in any language. ... Cruse draws a distinction between *subordinate semantic traits* and *capital traits*. Subordinate traits are those which have a role within the meaning of a word analogous to that of a modifier in a syntactic construction (e.g. *red* in *a red hat*). For instance, /walk/ is the capital trait

of *stroll*, /*good looking*/ of *pretty* and *handsome*. For *nag*, /*worthless*/ is a subordinate trait.<sup>61</sup>

The classification of synonyms according to Yule depends on whether the difference lies within the denotational or the connotational component: synonyms are classified into *ideographic* and *stylistic*.

*Ideographic synonyms* denote different shades of meaning or different degrees of a given quality. They are nearly identical in one or more denotational meanings and interchangeable at least in some contexts: e.g. *beautiful* – *fine* – *handsome* – *pretty*.

*Stylistic synonyms* differ not so much in denotational as in emotive value or stylistic sphere of application. Literary language often uses poetic words, archaisms as stylistic alternatives of neutral words: e.g. *maid* for *girl*, *bliss* for *happiness*, *steed* for *horse*, *quit* for *leave*. *Calling* and *vocation* in the synonymic group *occupation*, *calling*, *vocation*, and *business* are high-flown as compared to *occupation* and *business*.

In many cases, a stylistic synonym has an element of elevation in its meaning: e.g. *face* – *visage*, *girl* – *maiden*. Along with elevation of meaning, there is the reverse process of degradation: to *begin* – to *fire away*, to *eat* – to *devour*, to *steal* – to *pinch*, *face* – *muzzle*.

According to the criterion of interchangeability in context, synonyms are classified into *total*, *relative*, and *contextual*.

*Total synonyms*: are those members of a synonymic group which can replace each other in any given context, without the slightest alteration in denotative meaning or emotional meaning and connotations. They are very rare. Examples can be found mostly in special literature among technical terms and others: e.g. *fatherland* – *motherland*, *suslik* – *gopher*, *noun* – *substantive*, *functional affix* – *flection*, *inflection*, *scarlet fever* – *scarlatina*.

*Relative synonyms*: some authors class groups like *ask* – *beg* – *implore*, or *like* – *love* – *adore*, *gift* – *talent* – *genius*, *famous* – *celebrated* – *eminent* as relative synonyms, as they denote different degrees of the same notion or different shades of meaning and can be substituted only in some contexts. “Contextual or context-dependent synonyms are similar in meaning only under some specific distributional conditions. It may happen that the difference between the meanings of two words is contextually neutralised, e.g. *buy* and *get* would not generally be taken as synonymous, but they are synonyms in the following examples: *I’ll go to the shop and buy some bread./I’ll go to the shop and get some bread*” (Yule 1996: 118).

Synonymy is a relationship of semantic identity “either between readings of a word or between words. The first perspective involves comparing words with their full range of applications, the second comparing words as they appear with

61 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

a specific reading in a specific sentence. In both cases, the relationship may be *complete* or *partial*" (Geeraerts 2009: 81–82).

Synonymy is defined by de Kuthy as the relationship of sameness of meaning. "We can also extend this to graded synonymy, in which the amount of similarity between two words may not be 100%, but the words do overlap to some extent.

E.g. complete synonyms: *pavement* – *sidewalk*, *ascend* – *rise*, *hide* – *conceal*;  
partial synonyms: *book* – *volume*, *kid* – *child*, *sofa* – *couch*."<sup>62</sup>

The criterion of synonymy is interchangeability: if two terms can be used interchangeably in the same context, most probably they are synonymous.

Besides the linguistic context, synonymy depends on other factors like:

– register: *wife* [neutral], *spouse* [formal, legal term], *old lady* [highly informal];

– collocation: *big trouble* but not *large trouble*;

– connotation: *notorious* [negative], *famous* [positive]<sup>63</sup>; *immature* [negative], *young* [positive].

– dialectal variations, which may be geographical, *lift* (British English), *elevator* (American English), temporal, *wireless* became *radio*, and last but not least, social, *toilet* replaced *lavatory*;

– morpho-syntactic behaviour: e.g. *He began/started his speech with a quotation*.

*Tom tried to start his car / but not begin his car*.

*At the beginning of the world / but not start of the world*.

All the examples above refer to lexical synonymy, but there are also *grammatical synonyms*, operating at the level of morphology, means of expressing futurity, possibility, etc.

e.g. *He will go/is going/is to go tomorrow*.

*He can/may come to us next week if the weather is fine*.<sup>64</sup>

Choice among synonyms can be constrained by the usual collocations of a certain word:

e.g. *to tremble with fear* and *to quiver with excitement*. It may be determined by stylistic requirements: e.g. *girt* (neutral) – *maiden* (poetic) – *chick* (slang); *jolly good* (colloquial) – *very good* (neutral). Or it can be due to regional variations, *underground* (British English) – *subway* (American English); *pavement* (Br.) – *sidewalk* (Am.); *litter* (Br.) – *garbage* (Am.); *a storm in a teacup* (Br.) – *a tempest in a teapot* (Am.); etc. Sometimes, the synonymy between two terms can be merely contextual, e.g. *rancid* and *sour* are no real synonyms, but in the context *rancid butter* and *sour*

62 Kordula De Kuthy, *Linguistics* 201, October 8, 2001. Downloaded from: <http://www.ling.ohio-state.edu/~kdk/201/autumn01/slides/semantics-4up.pdf>. 4.

63 Just as in the case of the Hungarian *hires*, *hírhedt*.

64 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

*wine*, their meaning is similar (= *gone bad*). There is also a grammatical synonymy, e.g. *He would go/used to go there every day* (Vizental 2007: 56).

Another issue worth mentioning is the problem of *over-* and *underlexicalization*, strongly linked to culture and cultural norms. Matching up the cultural norms of synonyms and the degree of lexicalization is an important skill of the native speaker and in the process of translation alike.

Certain lexical fields can be seen to be *overlexicalized* if they are of particular interest to the speech community, and

while the number of Eskimo/Inuit words for *snow* is exaggerated, you need only think of the fine gradations in precipitation of *rain, sleet, wintry showers, hail, snow, rime, drizzle, spitting, bucketing down, downpour*, and so on to realise the interest in the temperate climate in British English. Other overlexicalised domains are often taboo or prohibited areas (*toilet, bog, lavatory, bathroom, crapper, netty, loo, cloakroom, WC, restroom, ensuite, shithouse, gents/ladies, little boys'/girls' room, thunderbox*, and so on). *Underlexicalised* domains tend to be highly technical, where only one very specific and precisely defined term exists, or areas which the speakers know little about and so use vague or general words (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 64–65).

A special kind of synonymy falls under the heading of *euphemism*, whereby a culturally or socially disagreeable word is replaced by a more agreeable one with essentially (though not exactly) the same meaning. Euphemisms are less harsh, offensive, or explicit: e.g. *vak/nemlátó* in Hungarian, the first lexeme sounds too harsh and abrupt, whereas the second term seems more respectful and polite towards people with eyesight problems.

All in all, synonyms are classes of words homogeneous from a grammatical point of view, having different expressions but a common content meaning: e.g. *happy/joyous/merry*. There are at least two main types of synonyms:

- Full or absolute synonyms: the semantic relation of synonyms that can exchange places in all contexts;

- Partial synonyms: the units affected by this semantic relation are synonymic with regard to one of the senses exhibited by the words.

Two words are not synonyms constantly and in all conditions as synonymy may vary in time and under various circumstances (context, style, register, connotations, etc.).

## Semantic contrasts and antonymy

Words characterized by semantic polarity or opposite meaning are usually called antonyms. Antonyms are, thus, words belonging to the same part of speech different in sound and characterized by semantic polarity or opposition

in their denotational meaning: amongst the commonest examples we may cite *quick – slow, big – small, long – short, rich – poor, happy – sad, hot – cold, old – young, male – female, true – false, alive – dead, etc.* Yet, the relations of antonymy are restricted to certain contexts: e.g. *thick* is only one of the antonyms of *thin* (*a thin slice – a thick slice*), another one is *fat* (*a thin man – a fat man*) (Kreidler 1998: 100). Thus, antonyms are words that are opposite in meaning, e.g. *hot – cold*. Still, such a definition of antonymy may prove insufficient, as antonyms may be nouns like *communist* and *non-communist* (or, we may add, *communist* and *capitalist*) or verbs such as *advance* and *retreat*, but antonymous pairs of adjectives are especially numerous.

With antonyms, we will come across the issues of gradability (*hot – cold, small – big*) and non-gradability (*dead – alive, asleep – awake*) and the issue of context dependency. The relations of antonymy are restricted to certain contexts: e.g. *thick* is only one of the antonyms of *thin* (*a thin slice – a thick slice*), another one is *fat* (*a thin man – a fat man*) (Kreidler 1998: 100).

In terms of lexical opposition, various classifications and terminological proposals compete with each other (scholars apply different criteria, formal and semantic ones as well); that is why, we shall attempt to present some taxonomies related to the phenomenon of antonymy.

The first taxonomy is proposed by Ginzburg et alii. It is more or less universally recognized, state Ginzburg et alii (1979: 60), that antonyms can be divided at least into three or more, correctly, four groups:

1. *Contradictories*: the type of semantic relations which admit no possibility of choice between them, e.g. pairs like *dead and alive, single and married, perfect and imperfect, etc.*: one is either single or married, either dead or alive. To use one of the terms is to contradict the other and to use *not* before one of them is to make it semantically equivalent to the other: *not dead = alive, not single = married*. A subgroup of contradictories is the type of pairs *young-old, big-small*, in the case of which the negation of one is not necessarily the same as the other: *not young* is not always *old*.
2. *Contraries* admit such possibilities of choice: e.g. *cold – hot*, and *cool* and *warm*, respectively *cold* and *hot* but also *cold* and *warm*.
3. *Incompatibles*: such semantic relations of incompatibility exist among the antonyms with a common component of meaning and may be described as the reverse of hyponymy, i.e. as the relations of exclusion but not of contradiction (the negation of one member of this set, however, does not imply semantic equivalence with the other, but it excludes the possibility of the other words of this set): e.g. To say *morning* is to say *not afternoon, not evening, not night* (the choice of one entails the exclusion of the others).

The taxonomy presented above seems to have emerged from the same principle as the next one, as both operate with a multi-layered classification of words with opposite meaning, but in this case besides contradictories,

contraries, and incompatibles, the authors further subdivide such words into complementaries, antonyms proper, reversibles and hierarchically opposed terms, and inverse opposition. When describing this second important paradigmatic relation besides synonymy, which is oppositeness of meaning, other authors do not name it simply antonymy, but *incompatibility*, which they further divide into the following subtypes: *complementarity*, *antonymy*, *reversibility*, *hierarchic opposition*, *inverse opposition*.

“Part of the meaning of a term belonging to a lexical set is its compatibility with all the other members of the same lexical set in a given context. The wider concept of meaning incompatibility includes distinct types of oppositeness of meaning, each of them being designated by a separate term.”<sup>65</sup>

a. *Complementarity* is a type of antonymic relation based on binary oppositions which do not allow for gradations between the extreme poles of a semantic axis: e.g. *single – married*, *male – female*, *alive – dead*. Validity of one term implies denial of the other, as when someone is married, it logically follows that the person is not single.

b. *Antonymy*. The term is used to designate those meaning oppositions which admit certain gradations with regard to the meaning expressed: e.g. *young – old*; *young-childish/juvenile/adolescent/young-mature/middle-aged/old/ancient*.

c. *Reversibility* refers to two terms which presuppose one another: *give – take*; *borrow – lend*; *buy – sell*; *husband – wife*; *offer – accept/refuse*; *employer – employee*.

d. *Hierarchic oppositions* are multiple taxonomies which include an element of ordering. Examples are sets of units of measurement – *inch/foot/yard*, calendar units – *month of the year* – or the hierarchy of numbers which is open-ended, that is it has no highest term. The *days of the week* opposition is a cyclic type of hierarchy, because it has no first/last member: e.g. *Sunday* is hierarchically opposed to *Monday*, as *Sunday* automatically implies that it means *not Monday*.

e. *Inverse opposition*: The main logical test for an inverse opposition is whether it obeys a special rule of synonymy which involves substituting one inverse term for another and changing the position of the a negative term in relation to the inverse term. Inverse opposition refers to individual lexemes: e.g. *all – some*; *willing – insist*; *still – already*; and to sentences as well: e.g. *Some countries have no coastline. = Not all countries have a coastline. All of us are non-smokers. = Not any of us are smokers.*<sup>66</sup>

Mullany and Stockwell also make a distinction between antonyms that are contraries and antonyms that are contradictory. They also introduce the term *contronym*:

65 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

66 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*



Some words have no apparent lexical antonyms: *table, elephant, fascism, chair, mouse, or communism* ... there are two distinct types of oppositeness in terms of *contrariness* and *contradiction*.

Some antonyms necessarily involve their other pair. For example, you cannot borrow something without someone else being able to lend it to you. You cannot return from somewhere that you have not gone to in the first place. *Come* and *go*, *this* and *that*, *yesterday*, *today*, and *tomorrow* all entail each other as part of their main meaning. A peculiar set of words in English are *contronyms*, words that can have their own opposite meaning. Famous examples include *fast* (both quickly moving and attached to a stationary object), *disperse* (give out or give up), *peer* (your social equal or a member of the aristocracy), *clip* (attach together or cut apart), *cover* (conceal or oversee), and many others (Mullany-Stockwell 2010: 65).

Another classification mentions the terms: *antonyms proper*, *complementary antonyms* and *conversive antonyms*, according to the character of the semantic opposition involved.

With antonyms proper, the semantic polarity is relative, the opposition is gradual, and it may embrace several elements characterized by different degrees of the same property. Antonyms proper always imply different degrees of comparison: e.g. *large* and *little* or *small* denote polar degrees of the same notion, i.e. size.

Complementary antonyms are words characterized only by a binary opposition which may have only two members; the denial of one member of the opposition implies the assertion of the other: e.g. not *male* means *female*.

Conversives are words which denote one and the same referent as viewed from different viewpoints: that of the subject and that of the object: e.g. *buy – sell*, *give – receive*.

According to the morphological (formal) criterion antonyms are subdivided into *root (absolute) antonyms* (*good – bad*) and *derivational antonyms* (*appear – disappear*).<sup>67</sup>

Other authors come up with other, more simplified taxonomies of antonyms, which usually operate a two-fold distinction of antonyms. For instance, Kreidler talks about *binary* and *non-binary antonyms*.

There are different kinds of antonymous relationships. *On* and *off* are binary antonyms: an electric light or a radio or a television set is either on or off; there is no middle ground. Other binary pairs are *open/shut*, *dead/alive*, *asleep/awake*. The terms *old* and *young* are non-binary antonyms and so are *wide* and *narrow*. They are opposite ends of a scale that includes various intermediate terms:

Mr Adams may be neither old nor young, the road may be something between wide and narrow. (Non-binary antonyms are also called *polar*



*antonyms*; like the North and South Poles, they are at opposite ends with territory between them. Analogously, binary antonyms might be called *hemispheric antonyms*; as with the Northern and Southern hemispheres [or the Eastern and Western hemispheres], there is no space in between, only a line of demarcation. Some semanticists use the term *complementary antonyms* in place of binary antonyms and *contrary* instead of non-binary) (Kreidler 1998: 101).

Adjectives that are non-binary antonyms can easily be modified: e.g. *very old*, *rather young*, *quite wide*, and *extremely narrow*. Logically, it would follow that binary antonyms do not accept modifiers: an organism is either dead or alive, a door is either open or shut, a floor is either clean or dirty, and one is either asleep or awake. But language is not logic, argues, Kreidler, as *quite dead*, *very much alive*, *wide open*, *slightly dirty* are meaningful expressions. For instance, we add, it is perfectly acceptable to utter a sentence like: *Someone said he had died, but when I met him last week, I could see that he was very much alive*.

Speakers cannot agree as to whether a door which is *ajar* is open or shut, nor can they do on the precise location of the distinction between *clean* and *dirty*. Language, in this sense, is fluid-flexible, concludes the linguist (Kreidler 1998: 101–102).

Non-binary adjectives are also gradable adjectives. We can say, for instance, *very long*, *rather short*, *quite strong*, *somewhat weak*, *too old*, *young enough*, *extremely rude*, *utterly happy*... From a logical point of view, binary adjectives are not gradable... But people treat these essentially ungradable adjectives as if they were gradable. Something is either complete or incomplete, but we sometimes say *more complete* (Kreidler 1998: 103–104).

Some pairs of antonyms are morphologically related, as one member of the pair is formed by adding a prefix to the other: *happy* – *unhappy*; *proper* – *improper*; *trust* – *distrust*; *tie* – *untie*; or by changing a prefix: *exhale* – *inhale*; *converge* – *diverge*; *progress* – *regress*; *inflate* – *deflate*.

Another subtype of antonymy is *converseness*, which is a kind of antonymy between two terms:

e.g. *The dictionary is more expensive than the novel.*

*The novel is less expensive than the dictionary.*

In converse relations, most adjectives allow for gradience “more A and less A, with a scale along which there are various amounts of ‘more’ or ‘less’”. Converse relations with other parts of speech are more like binary antonymy: *parent* and *offspring*” (Kreidler 1998: 106).

Context may sometimes make antonyms: e.g. the opposite of *old* is *young* if we are talking about animate beings, but the opposite is *new* with reference to an inanimate object like a shirt. *Short* contrasts with *long* with reference to a pencil or a journey, but the antonym is *tall* when talking about humans and other animals: e.g. *He is old* vs. *He is young* and *This shirt is old* vs. *This shirt is new*.

De Kuthy separates, firstly, *gradable* antonyms, such as *big/small*, *good/bad* (which permit the expression of degrees: *very big*, *quite small*) from *non-gradable* antonyms (also called *complementary* terms), which do not permit degrees of contrast, such as *single/married*, *male/female* (since it is not possible to talk of *very female*, *quite married*, etc). Secondly, she distinguishes between *converse* terms (two-way contrasts that are interdependent, such as *buy/sell* or *parent/child*; one member presupposes the other) and *asymmetrical terms* (superordinate and subordinate terms; for example, *horse* is a subordinate term of *animal*, and a superordinate term of *pony*).<sup>68</sup>

## Hyponymy

Another type of paradigmatic relation is *hyponymy*, or *inclusion*. It implies, as a rule, multiple taxonomies, i.e. a series of hypo-ordinate/subordinate terms being included in the area of a hyperordinate/superordinate term. Hyponyms are words whose meanings are specific instances of a more general word, i.e. one thing is (kind of) in another thing: e.g. *cats* and *dogs* are hyponyms of the word *animal* (which is the superordinate term in the hierarchy); *daffodil* – *flower*/*carrot* – *vegetable*/*ant* – *insect*, etc.

When defining the concept of hyponymy, the notion of a semantic field or domain is of utmost importance.

A semantic field denotes a segment of reality symbolized by a set of related words. The words in a semantic field share a common semantic property. Most often, fields are defined by subject matter, such as body parts, landforms, diseases, colors, foods, or kinship relations. Internally, these may be organized hierarchically (e.g. royalty, military ranks), part to whole (e.g. body parts), sequentially (e.g. numbers), or cyclically (e.g. days of the week, months of the year), as well as with no discernible order.<sup>69</sup>

A hierarchical approach based on semantic fields leads to the classification of vocabulary items into lexico-semantic groups; thus, we study the hyponymic relations between words. By hyponymy, we mean a semantic relationship of inclusion, such as *vehicle* includes *car*, *bus*, *taxi*, and so on; *oak* implies *tree*. Hyponymy is the case in which the meaning of one form is included in the meaning of another, the relationship is described as hyponymy, and some typical example pairs are *daffodil* – *flower*, *dog* – *animal*, *poodle* – *dog*, *carrot* – *vegetable*, etc. “The concept of ‘inclusion’ involved here is the idea that if any object is a

68 Kordula De Kuthy, *Linguistics* 201, October 8, 2001. Downloaded from: <http://www.ling.ohio-state.edu/~kdk/201/autumn01/slides/semantics-4up.pdf>. 4.

69 Laurel J. Brinton, *The Structure of Modern English Workbook*. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Downloaded from: <https://pantherfile.uwm.edu/iverson/www/docs/6.pdf>. 112–113.

*daffodil*, then it is necessarily a *flower*; so the meaning of *flower* is ‘included’ in the meaning of *daffodil*. Or, *daffodil* is a hyponym of *flower*.

When we consider hyponymous relations, we are essentially looking at the meaning of words in some type of hierarchical relationship” (Yule 1996: 119). Another example is *red* and *scarlet*: “the meaning of *red* is included in the meaning of *scarlet*. *Red* is the superordinate term; *scarlet* is a hyponym of *red* (*scarlet* is a kind of red)” (Hurford et alii 2007: 109).

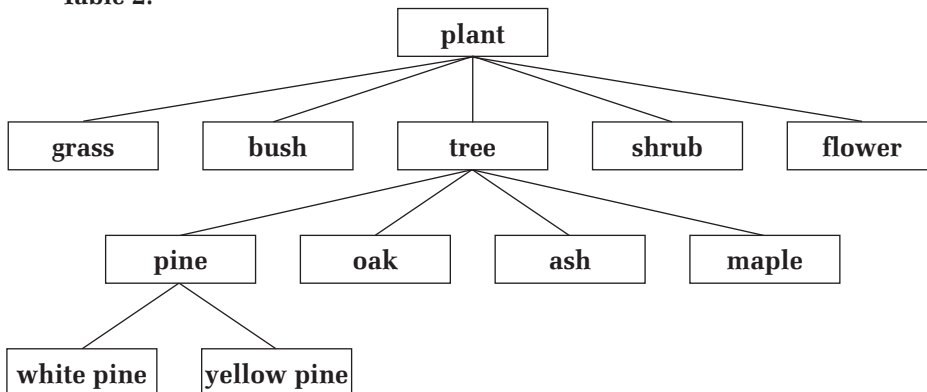
In this sense, we must clarify the meaning of the terms *hyponym*, *hyperonym*, *subordinate*, *superordinate*, *classifier*, and *member*.

The terms hyponymy and hyperonymy both refer to the relationship of semantic inclusion that holds between a more general term such as *bird* and a more specific one such as *finch*. Terminologically speaking, the more general term is the hyperonym (sometimes hypernym) or superordinate term, the more specific term is the hyponym or the subordinate term. In this respect, subordination or hyponymy could be thought of as the relationship of the hyponym with regard to the hyperonym, whereas superordination or hyperonymy would be the relationship of the hyperonym with regard to the hyponym. In practice, this shift of perspective is largely disregarded, and both terms are used interchangeably, with hyponymy – following the terminology introduced by Lyons – as the most popular one. Words that are hyponyms on the same level of the same hyperonym are co-hyponyms. Thus, for instance, *robin*, *swallow*, and *finch* are co-hyponyms of *bird*. The reference to level in this definition of co-hyponymy is necessary because hyponymy is a transitive relationship: if *tit* is a hyponym of *bird*, and *titmouse* and *titlark* are hyponyms of *tit*, then *titmouse* and *titlark* are also hyponyms of *bird*, but clearly, *titmouse* and *titlark* could not be co-hyponyms of *finch*, which is situated on a different hierarchical level with regard to *bird*. It may also happen that the same term occurs on different levels of taxonomy, such as when *dog* contrasts with *cat* on one level, but with *bitch* on a lower level of the taxonomy. *Dog* in the reading ‘member of the species *Canis familiaris*’ is then a hyperonym of *dog* in the reading ‘male member of the species *Canis familiaris*’. *Dog* is, in other words, an auto-hyponymous term. It will also be clear from this example that hyponymy, like synonymy and antonymy, is not strictly speaking a relationship between words, but between words in a particular reading (Geeraerts 2009: 80).

The general term (*vehicle*, *tree*, *animal*, etc.) is sometimes referred to as the *classifier* and serves to describe the lexico-semantic groups, e.g. lexico-semantic groups of vehicles, movement, emotions, etc. The individual terms, called members of the group contain (or entail) the meaning of the general term in addition to their individual meanings, which distinguish them from each other. In such hierarchical structures, certain words may be both classifiers and

members of the groups. This may be illustrated by the hyponymic structure represented below (based on Ginzburg et alii 1979: 53).

**Table 2.**



Source: Ginzburg et alii 1979: 53

The more specific term, or the member of the group, is also called the hyponym (e.g. *grass*, *tree*) and the more general term, or the classifier, is called the hyperonym (*plant*). It is easy to see that, for instance, *tree* may be the hyperonym, or the classifier, of *pine* and *pine* may also serve as the hyperonym, or the classifier, of *white pine*, *yellow pine*, etc. One term may be a superordinate to various hyponyms and at the same time be a hyponym of some higher superordinates.

Hyponymic classification relies on the principle of hierarchical classification, which is widely used by scientists in various fields of research: botany, geology, and other domains.

There are also very general lexemes, super-superordinates, as it were: *thing*, *stuff*, *place*, *person*, etc.<sup>70</sup>

A word is a *hyponym* of another if it is part of the general category and is regarded as more general than the subordinate term. So, *mammal* is a hyponym of *dog* and *dog* is a hyponym of *terrier* and *terrier* is a hyponym of *Yorkshire terrier*. Mullany–Stockwell also introduce the term *meronymy* in case there is a part–whole relationship between the hyponyms and hyperonyms.

The relationship between the things denoted by hyponyms is conceptual, whereas if there is an actual part–whole relationship between the referents of related words, then the relationship between those words is said to be one of *meronymy*. ‘Hand and fingers’ are in a meronymous relationship,

70 Badea, (2012.: 80–81) calls these *maximal hyperonyms*: „hiperonime maximale, de fapt *patonime*, adică unități lexicale care pot face trimitere atât la persoane și lucruri, cât și la noțiuni abstracte {*ceva*, *chestie*, *lucru*, *chose*, *machin*, *truc* etc.).”

as are ‘car and tyres’, or ‘tree and leaves’, or ‘Washington and the US’. The part–whole relationship is often so culturally naturalised that one can be used for the other: ‘Washington condemned the attacks’, ‘Can I give you a hand?’ The extent to which the *meronym* (the most particular word) is a necessary and essential defining part of the *holonym* (the superordinate word) is debatable: is a hand without fingers still a hand? A dog without a tail? Without legs? Without a head? If the meronym is a defining part, then there should be a necessary logical consequence if anything happens to it: for example, if the tyres are on fire, is it the case then that the car is necessarily on fire? (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 65–66)

Hurford et alii further explain the implications of hyponymy: “We define hyponymy in such a way that synonymy counts as a special case of hyponymy. For example, given two synonyms, such as *mercury* and *quicksilver*, we say for convenience that these also illustrate the hyponymy relationship, and that *mercury* and *quicksilver* are hyponyms of each other. Thus, synonymy can be seen as a special case of hyponymy, i.e. symmetrical hyponymy” (Hurford et alii 2007: 111).

Thus, hyponymy and synonymy are sense relations between predicates. The latter is a special, symmetric case of the former. The sense relations between predicates and those between sentences are systematically connected by rules such as the basic rule of sense inclusion (Hurford et alii 2007: 116).

## Homonymy

Words identical in sound-form but different in meaning are traditionally termed homonyms. A word which has two or more entirely distinct (unrelated) meanings is usually called a homonym: e.g. *bank*: ‘financial institution’; ‘of a river’; *bat*: ‘flying creature’ or ‘used in sports’; *race*: ‘contest of speed’ or ‘ethnic group’.

Not only words but other linguistic units may also be homonymous (see the problem of homonymous affixes or homonymous phrases).

Modern English is exceptionally rich in homonymous words and word forms. “It is held that languages where short words abound have more homonyms than those where longer words are prevalent. Therefore it is sometimes suggested that abundance of homonyms in Modern English is to be accounted for by the monosyllabic structure of the commonly used English words” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 38).

The classifications talk about:

- two types of homonymy: full and partial homonymy;
- lexical, lexico-grammatical, and grammatical homonymy.

## Full and partial homonymy

When analysing different cases of homonymy, we find that some words are homonymous in all their forms, “i.e. we observe full homonymy of the paradigms of two or more different words, e.g. in *seal1* – ‘a sea animal’ and *seal2* – ‘a design printed on paper by means of a stamp’. The paradigm ‘seal, seal’s, seals, seals’ is identical for both of them – full homonymy.

In other cases, e.g. *seal1* – ‘a sea animal’ and (*to*) *seal*, – ‘to close tightly’, we see that although some individual word forms are homonymous the whole of the paradigm is not identical.

*seal1* = a sea animal: seal, seal’s, seals, seals’

*seal2* = to close tightly: seal, seals, sealed, sealing – partial homonymy” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 40).

A lot of full homonyms can be found within the same parts of speech; partial homonymy, as a rule, is observed in word forms belonging to different parts of speech. (This does not mean that partial homonymy is impossible within one part of speech.)

For instance, in the case of the two verbs – *lie* [lai] – ‘to be in a horizontal or resting position’ and *lie* [lai] – ‘to make an untrue statement’ – we also find partial homonymy as only two word-forms [lai], [laiz] are homonymous, all other forms of the two verbs are different.

Cases of full homonymy may be found in different parts of speech too; e.g. *for* [fo:] – preposition, *for* [fo:] – conjunction and *four* [fo:] – numeral, as these parts of speech have no other word-forms (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 40).

## Lexical, lexico-grammatical, and grammatical homonymy

Homonyms may be also classified by the type of meaning into lexical, lexico-grammatical and grammatical homonyms. In *seal1* *n* and *seal2* *n*, e.g., the part-of-speech meaning of the word and the grammatical meanings of all its forms are identical (cf. seal [si:l] Common Case Singular, seal’s [si:lz] Possessive Case Singular for both *seal1* and *seal2*). The difference is confined to the lexical meaning only: *seal1* denotes ‘a sea animal’, ‘the fur of this animal’, etc., *seal2* – ‘a design printed on paper, the stamp by which the design is made’, etc. So we can say that *seal2* and *seal1* are lexical homonyms because they differ in lexical meaning.

If we compare *seal1* – ‘a sea animal’, and (*to*) *seal3* – ‘to close tightly’, we shall observe not only a difference in the lexical meaning of their homonymous word-forms but a difference in their grammatical meanings as well.

Identical sound-forms, i.e. seals [si:lz] (Common Case Plural of the noun) and (he) seals [si: lz] (third person singular of the verb) possess each of them different grammatical meanings. As both grammatical and lexical meanings differ, we describe these homonymous word forms as lexico-grammatical. Lexico-grammatical homonymy generally implies that the homonyms in question belong to different parts of speech as the part-of-speech meaning is a blend of the lexical and grammatical semantic components. There may be cases however when lexico-grammatical homonymy is observed within the same part of speech, e.g., in the verbs (*to*) *find* [faɪnd] and (*to*) *found* [faʊnd], where the homonymic word-forms: found [faʊnd] – Past Tense of (to) find and found [faʊnd] (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 40).

Homonymy is the semantic relation in which two or more words of forms from the paradigm of words are different in meaning but identical in expression. In the case of homonymy, the identity of expression is purely coincidental: *meet/meat*, *piece/peace*. Homonyms are words which have the same form but are different in meaning. “*The same form* implies identity in sound form or spelling, i.e. all the three aspects are taken into account: sound form, graphic form and meaning. Both meanings of the form *liver* are, for instance, intentionally present in the following play upon words: *Is life worth living? – It depends upon the liver.*”<sup>71</sup>

The term *homonymy* is used when one form (written and spoken) has two or more unrelated meanings. Examples of homonyms are the pairs *bank* (of a river) – *bank* (financial institution), *bat* (flying creature) – *bat* (used in sports), *race* (contest of speed) – *race* (ethnic group), *pupil* (at school) – *pupil* (in the eye), and *mole* (on skin) – *mole* (small animal).

The temptation is to think that the two types of *bank* must be related in meaning. They are not. Homonyms are words which have quite separate meanings, but which have accidentally come to have exactly the same form. Relatedness of meaning accompanying identical form is technically known as polysemy, which can be defined as one form (written or spoken) having multiple meanings which are all related by extension. Examples are the word *head*, used to refer to the object on top of your body, on top of a glass of beer, on top of a company or department; or *foot* (of person, of bed, of mountain), or *run* (person does, water does, colors do) (Yule 1996: 121).

The two main sources and causes of homonymy are:

- 1) diverging meaning development of a polysemantic word;
- 2) converging sound development of two or more different words.

The process of diverging meaning development can be observed when different meanings of the same word move so far away from each other that they come to be regarded as two separate units. This happened, for example, in the case of Modern English *flower* and *flour*, which originally



were one word (*ME. flour*, cf. *OFr. flour, flor*; *L. flos – florem*) meaning ‘the flower’ and ‘the finest part of wheat’. The difference in spelling underlines the fact that from the synchronic point of view they are two distinct words even though historically they have a common origin.

Convergent sound development is the most potent factor in the creation of homonyms. The great majority of homonyms arise as a result of converging sound development which leads to the coincidence of two or more words which were phonetically distinct at an earlier date. For example, *OE. ic* and *OE. eaze* have become identical in pronunciation (*MnE. I* [ai] and *eye* [ai]). A number of lexico-grammatical homonyms appeared as a result of convergent sound development of the verb and the noun (cf. *MnE. love – (to) love* and *OE. lufu – lufian*). Words borrowed from other languages may through phonetic convergence become homonymous. *ON. ras* and *Fr. race* are homonymous in Modern English (cf. *race1* [reis] – ‘running’ and *race2* [reis] – ‘a distinct ethnical stock’) (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 42–43).

When homonyms can occur in the same position in utterances, the result is *lexical ambiguity*: e.g. *I was on my way to the bank* (the two meanings of *bank* refer to depositing or withdrawing money from a financial institution, on the one hand, or fishing or boating, on the other hand). “Ambiguity occurs also because a longer linguistic form has a literal sense and a figurative sense. There’s a skeleton in our closet. *Skeleton in the closet* can mean ‘an unfortunate event that is kept a family secret’. With this meaning, *skeleton in the closet* is a single lexeme; with its ‘literal’ meaning, it is a phrase composed of several lexemes” (Kreidler 1998: 53).

## Homographs, homophones, and perfect homonyms, or homonyms proper

Words are two-facet units possessing sound, form, and meaning, which is why identity can affect all these aspects. The identity of sound form, graphic form, and meaning will lead us to the differentiation between homographs, homophones, and perfect homonyms. Thus, the most widely accepted classification of homonyms is that recognizing homonyms proper (also called perfect homonyms), homophones, and homographs.

**Perfect homonyms, or homonyms proper**, as we have already seen, are words identical both in spelling and in sound form but different in meaning, e.g. *case1 n* – ‘something that has happened’ and *case2 n* – ‘a box, a container’ (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 41).

In homonyms, such as *bank* ‘a financial institution’ and *bank* ‘the edge of a stream’, pronunciation and spelling are identical but meanings are unrelated.



So, it happens with *back* n. ‘part of the body’ – *back* adv. ‘away from the front’ – *back* v. ‘go back’; *bear* n. ‘animal’ – *bear* v. ‘carry, tolerate’.<sup>72</sup>

**Homographs** are words identical in spelling but different both in their sound form and meaning, e.g. *bow* n [bou] – ‘a piece of wood curved by a string and used for shooting arrows’ and *bow* n [bau] – ‘the bending of the head or body’; *tear* n [tia] – ‘a drop of water that comes from the eye’ and *tear* v [tea] – ‘to pull apart by force’ (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 41).

Among homographs, i.e. two words that have different pronunciations but the same spelling, we may cite examples like *bow*, rhyming with *go* and referring to an instrument for shooting arrows, and *bow*, rhyming with *cow* and indicating a bending of the body as a form of respectful greeting. Homographs are, thus, words that are different in sound and in meaning, but accidentally identical in spelling: *bow* [bou] – *bow* [bau], *lead* [li:d] – *lead* [led].<sup>73</sup>

**Homophony** refers to different words pronounced the same but spelled differently. Homophones are words identical in sound form but different both in spelling and in meaning: e.g. *two*, *to*, and *too*, *flour* and *flower*, *meat* and *meet*, *right* and *write*. Other examples of homophones: *air* – *heir*; *buy* – *by*, *him* – *hymn*, *steel* – *steal*, *storey* – *story*.

Let us clarify two more terms: *homofoms* and *paronyms*.

*Homofoms* are words identical in some of their grammatical forms. *To bound* (jump, spring) – *bound* (past participle of the verb *bind*); *found* (establish) – *found* (past participle of the verb *find*).

*Paronyms* are words that are alike in form but different in meaning and usage. They are liable to be mixed and sometimes mistakenly interchanged. The term *paronym* comes from the Greek words *para* (= beside) and *onoma* (= name). Some examples are: *precede* – *proceed*, *preposition* – *proposition*, *popular* – *populous*.<sup>74</sup>

## Polysemy

Words are not usually units with a single meaning. Monosemy is rare and monosemantic words, i.e. words having only one meaning, are comparatively few in number.

Few single words in English are *monosemantic* (i.e. having only one meaning). For example, Webster gives only one definition to the adverb ‘*heretofore*’ {~ ‘before this time; until now’}; this is probably because the word is highly sophisticated and used only in elevated contexts. Monosemy is more frequent among complex lexical items, e.g. phrasal

72 Lectures on English lexicology, 2010, Lectures.on.Le\_icology1.pdf.

73 Lectures on English lexicology, 2010, Lectures.on.Le\_icology1.pdf.

74 Lectures on English lexicology, 2010, Lectures.on.Le\_icology1.pdf.

verbs (e.g. *to call off* – ‘to cancel’, *to drop out* = ‘to cease to participate’), or idiomatic phrases (e.g. *in a nutshell* = ‘briefly’, *to make up one’s mind* = ‘to decide’, etc.) (Vizental 2007: 57).

The majority of English words are polysemantic, i.e. they possess more than one meaning. Polysemantic words are the lexemes which have several meanings. A word which has *multiple meanings related by extension* is called a *polysemantic word*: e.g. *bright*: ‘shining’, ‘intelligent’; *head* of the body and the person at the top of a company; *foot* of a body and of a mountain and of the bed or chair; *run* a person runs, the water runs.

“In polysemantic words, however, we are faced not with the problem of analysis of individual meanings, but primarily with the problem of the interrelation and interdependence of the various meanings in the semantic structure of one and the same word” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 34). Polysemy is understood as the growth and development of meaning or as a change in the semantic structure of the word.

*Polysemy* and *homonymy* describe similar effects arising from different histories. A word is polysemous if it has developed two distinct meanings, whereas we can talk about a homonym where two distinct words have converged. For example, ‘sole’ (the bottom of a shoe) and ‘sole’ (a type of fish) are polysemes, but ‘seal’ (the coastal mammal) and ‘seal’ (a glued interface) are homonyms. The distinction between these two lexical semantic types is often only possible with some knowledge of etymology (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 66).

Diachronically, polysemy may imply that a word may retain its previous meaning or meanings and at the same time acquire one or several new ones. “The terms secondary and derived meaning are to a certain extent synonymous. When we describe the meaning of the word as ‘secondary’, we imply that it could not have appeared before the primary meaning was in existence. When we refer to the meaning as ‘derived’, we imply not only that, but also that it is dependent on the primary meaning and somehow subordinate to it” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 34).

E.g. the case of the word *table*: we may say that the meaning ‘the food put on the table’ is a secondary meaning as it is derived from the meaning ‘a piece of furniture (on which meals are laid out)’.

Polysemy, viewed diachronically, is a historical change in the semantic structure of the word, which results in the disappearance of some meanings and/or the appearance of new meanings, which may be added to the already existing ones.

Synchronically, we understand polysemy as:

the coexistence of various meanings of the same word at a certain historical period of the development. We make the difference between basic or the central meaning of the word and all other meanings, or minor meanings. There are several terms used to denote approximately the same concepts: basic (major) meaning as opposed to minor meanings or central as opposed

to marginal meanings. ... Stylistic (or regional) status of monosemantic words is easily perceived. With polysemantic words, stylistically neutral meanings are naturally more frequent (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 37–38).

Polysemy, viewed synchronically, refers to the coexistence of the various meanings of the same word over a certain historical period.

As the semantic structure is never static, the relationship between the diachronic and synchronic evaluation of the individual meanings of the same word may be different in different periods of the historical development of language. The semantic structure of polysemantic words is not homogeneous as far as the status of individual meanings is concerned. Some meaning(s) is/are representative of the word in isolation, while others are perceived only in certain contexts (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 37–38).

Polysemy is very characteristic of the English vocabulary due to the monosyllabic character of English words and the predominance of root words. “The greater the frequency of the word, the greater the number of meanings that constitute its semantic structure. A special formula known as ‘Zipf’s law’ has been worked out to express the correlation between frequency, word length and polysemy: the shorter the word, the higher its frequency of use; the higher the frequency, the wider its combinability, i.e. the more word combinations it enters; the wider its combinability, the more meanings are realised in these contexts.”<sup>75</sup> Zdrengeha (1977: 101) quotes G. K. Zipf’s article *The repetition of words, time-perspective and semantic balance* (in *The Journal of General Psychology*, XXXII, 1945: 144), where the writer suggests that different meanings of a word will tend to be equal to the square root of its relative frequency, with the possible exception of the few dozen most frequent words.

By systematically comparing the relative frequency of various words with the number of senses in which they are used, G. K. Zipf arrives at an interesting conclusion which he terms *the principle of diversity of meanings*. According to Zipf, there is a direct relationship between the number of different meanings of a word and its relative frequency of occurrences... Zipf’s formula has the great advantage that it can be readily tested in any language where figures for word frequency are available. On the other hand, the method should be used with extreme care. Much will depend on the comprehensiveness of the various dictionaries, the extent to which they record technical and semi-technical usage. The broader correlation between polysemy and word frequency is, however, more plausible (Zdrengeha 1977: 101).

Polysemy is the case when the same phonological form (word) has different semantic mappings (meanings): *game/game*; *bar/bar*. If the two meanings are unrelated, as in the word *pen* meaning both *writing instrument* and *enclosure*,

75 Lectures on English lexicology, 2010, Lectures.on.Le\_icology1.pdf.

they are considered homonyms. Ambiguity or polysemy exists only by virtue of some semantic markers common to ambiguous units. Polysemy is a fertile source of ambiguity in language. In a limited number of cases, two major meanings of the same word are differentiated by formal means: inflection, word order, and spelling (*ambassador extraordinary* – *extraordinary ambassador*; *discreet* – *discrete*, *draft* – *draught*).

## The demarcation line between homonymy and polysemy

The borderline between polysemy and homonymy is rather vague and blurry. Polysemy may also arise from homonymy. When two words become identical in sound form, the meanings of the two words are felt as making up one semantic structure.

Thus, the human *ear* and the *ear of corn* are from the diachronic point of view two homonyms. One is etymologically related to *L. auris*, the other to *L. acus, aceris*. Synchronically, however, they are perceived as two meanings of one and the same word. The *ear of corn* is felt to be a metaphor of the usual type (cf. *the eye of the needle*, *the foot of the mountain*) and consequently as one of the derived or, synchronically, minor meanings of the polysemantic word *ear* (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 34).

Homonyms differing in graphic form, e.g. such lexical homonyms as *knight* – *night* or *flower* – *flour*, are easily perceived to be two different lexical units as any formal difference of words is felt as indicative of the existence of two separate lexical units.

It is often argued that in general the context in which the words are used suffices to establish the borderline between homonymous words, e.g. the meaning of *case*<sub>1</sub> in *several cases of robbery* can be easily differentiated from the meaning of *case*<sub>2</sub> in *a jewel case, a glass case*. This, however, is true of different meanings of the same word as recorded in dictionaries, e.g. of *case*, as can be seen by comparing *the case will be tried in the law-court* and *the possessive case of the noun*. Thus, the context serves to differentiate meanings but is of little help in distinguishing between homonymy and polysemy (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 43).

In the 1970s, linguists still considered that no formal means had been found to differentiate between several meanings of one word and the meanings of its homonyms (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 43).

Nevertheless, we must mention that today lexicographers distinguish between polysemy and homonymy by treating a word with several meanings (polysemantic) as one single entry in the dictionary (enumerating all possible meanings under the same heading), whereas considering homonyms as separate words, and therefore treating them as different entries in the dictionary.

Lexicographers and semanticists sometimes have to decide whether a form with a wide range of meanings is an instance of polysemy or of homonymy.... Dictionaries recognize the distinction between polysemy and homonymy by making a polysemous item a single dictionary entry and making homophonous lexemes two or more separate entries.... The distinction between homonymy and polysemy is not an easy one to make. Two lexemes are either identical in form or not, but relatedness of meaning is not a matter of yes or no; it is a matter of more or less (Kreidler 1998: 52–53).

As a conclusion, polysemy refers to the cases where a word has several meanings, while homonymy refers to cases where two or more different words have the same form.

Polysemy refers to the cases where a word has more than one meaning; for example, *chip* can mean a piece of wood, food, or electronic circuit. People see no problem in saying that “the word *chip* has several different meanings in English”. Homonymy refers to cases where two or more different words have the same shape (sound identical): for example, *bank* is both a building and an area of ground. Again, people see no problem in saying that “these are two different words in English”.<sup>76</sup>

## Syntagmatic Relations

“The connection between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations appears obvious, since in choosing a certain term from a synonymic series, we must take into account *selectional restrictions*.”<sup>77</sup> Among syntagmatic relations, we mention *collocations* and *prototypical relations*.

## Collocations

Collocations are words which tend to occur with other words: e.g. *table/chair*, *butter/bread*, *salt/pepper*, or *hammer/nail*.

A particular type of arbitrary co-occurrence restrictions are *collocational restrictions*. Collocational restrictions vary in the degree to which they can be specified in terms of required semantic traits. When fully specifiable, they may be described as *systematic collocational restrictions*: e.g. *pass away* /animate/ and *kick the bucket* /human/.

When there are exceptions to the general tendency in collocating, we may speak of *semi-systematic collocational restrictions*: e.g. *customer* /acquire

76 Kordula De Kuthy, *Linguistics* 201, October 8, 2001. Downloaded from: <http://www.ling.ohio-state.edu/~kdk/201/autumn01/slides/semantics-4up.pdf>.

77 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

of something material in exchange for money/ *client* /acquire of a certain type of service/, but a client of a bank is called *customer*, too.

The collocational ranges of some lexical items can only be described by listing permissible collocants. Such items will be described as having *idiosyncratic collocational restrictions*.<sup>78</sup>

We seem to organize our knowledge of words simply in terms of collocation, or words frequently occurring together.

If you ask a thousand people what they think of when you say *hammer*, more than half will say *nail*. If you say *table*, they'll mostly say *chair* and for *butter* – *bread*, for *needle* – *thread*, and for *salt* – *pepper*... Some collocations are joined pairs of words such as *salt and pepper* or *husband and wife*. However, *salt* will also make some people say *water* because of the common collocation *salt water*. And for many people in the USA, the word *red* elicits *white and blue* (the colors of the flag). It may be that part of knowing a language is knowing not only what words mean, but what their typical collocations are. Thus, part of your knowledge of *fresh* is as it occurs in the phrase *fresh air*, or *knife* as in *knife and fork* or *enough* as in *enough already* (Yule 1996: 122–123).

## Prototypes

While the words *canary*, *dove*, *duck*, *flamingo*, *parrot*, *pelican*, *robin*, *swallow*, and *thrush* are all equally co-hyponyms of the superordinate term or hyperonym *bird*, they are not all considered to be equally good exemplars of the category or prototype *bird*. According to some researchers, for many American English speakers, the most characteristic instance of the category *bird* is robin.

The idea of “the characteristic instance” of a category is known as the prototype. The concept of a prototype helps explain the meaning of certain words, like *bird*, not in terms of component features (e.g. “has feathers,” “has wings”), but in terms of resemblance to the clearest example. Thus, 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 *pigeon*. These last two are much closer to the prototype (Yule 2010: 119).

The fact that people tend to think and organize their linguistic knowledge according to certain prototypes is not new (see the chapter on types of meaning and the characteristics of prototypical meaning).

Given the category label *furniture*, we are quicker to recognize *chair* as an exemplar than *bench* or *stool*. Given *clothing*, people recognize *shirts*

quicker than *shoes*, and given *vegetable*, they accept *carrot* before *potato* or *tomato*. It is obvious that there is some general pattern to the categorization process involved in prototypes and that it determines our interpretation of word meaning. However, this is one area where individual experience results in variation in interpretation, as when people disagree about whether *tomato* is a fruit or a vegetable (Yule 1996: 120).

## More special semantic relations

### Plesionymy

A word is a plesionym if it is a near-synonym, but substitution of the word does not leave the same truth-conditions. For example, in *It wasn't misty, just foggy*, the words *misty* and *foggy* are plesionyms of each other. Other examples would be: "he was murdered, or rather executed"; "he's a farmer, or strictly a stockman"; or "it's a pie, or actually a savoury tart". Plesionyms are often used to indicate that the speaker is grappling for precision, but perhaps does not possess the precise vocabulary or technical term for the object in mind. Though subtle, the reality of plesionymy can be illustrated by considering some odd examples that are cast in the right form but are not lexical plesionyms: "'My brother's a shopkeeper, or more exactly a policeman'; '?She bought a dog, or more exactly, a cat'; '?It wasn't misty, just sunny'" (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 66).

### Philonymy

All closely located words in coherent discourse usually exhibit *philonymy*. Two words are philonyms if they collocate in an acceptable and expected way: "the speaker can speak French"; "the pregnant woman"; "fine and dandy". Antonyms, if used in a coherent sentence, can be philonymous (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 66).

### Xenonymy

Words which are not used philonymously are *xenonyms* if they create semantic dissonance: "fat water"; "the inexorable sadness of pencils"; "whispering lunar incantations dissolve the floors of memory". Such xenonyms are often the ground of creative or literary language (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 66).



## Tautonyms

Two words are *tautonyms* if they merely repeat without adding new value, creating a tautology: “the speaker is speaking”; “boys will be boys”; “war is war”. “Of course, it is easy to imagine contexts in which these tautonymous phrases could be communicatively valid, demonstrating again that connotations and associations are imported along with denotations whenever words are brought together” (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 66).

A tautology is conceptually uninformative by the juxtaposition of two synonyms within the same sentence: e.g. “He is his father’s son”. However, on the pragmatic level, the very repetition of an item carries additional meaning: e.g. “He is his father’s son” suggests that he is, in certain respects, very much like his father.... Tautologies are frequent in idiomatic and colloquial speech: e.g. “Boys will be boys”; “What’s yours is yours”; “If you must, you must” (Vizental 2007: 122–129).

## Meronymy

As we have seen earlier, meronymy is a part–whole relation, to be distinguished from a taxonomical, hyponymous relation.

Meronymy holds between pairs such as arm and elbow: arm is the holonym and elbow is the meronym. Meronymy can be identified in terms of the predicates ‘has’ and ‘is a part of’ (an *arm* has an *elbow*, and an *elbow* is part of the *arm*), rather than in terms of the ‘is a’-relationship that obtains in the case of hyponymy (a *finch* is a *bird*). ... The part–whole relation is not a unitary one, but rather comprises a number of subtypes, like the relation between component parts and the material entity to which they belong (*keyboard/computer*), the relation between a member and the collection to which it belongs (*soldier/army*), the relation between a material and the object of which it forms an ingredient or a constituent element (*wood/door*), or the relation between a component action and the overall activity of which it forms part (*paying/shopping*) (Geeraerts 2009: 85).





## SEMANTIC ROLES

Every simple sentence – every proposition – has one predicate and a varying number of referring expressions, or arguments. In semantic analysis, every proposition contains one predicate and a varying number of referring expressions (noun phrases) called arguments. The meaning of a predicate is determined in part by how many arguments it may have and what role those arguments have.

A sentence is defined as a composite of inflection and proposition, and a proposition consists of a subject and a predicate. Inflection includes agreement and tense; agreement is the formal bond between subject and predicate, a bond that varies considerably from one language to another. Tense is a system of contrasts that locates the general meaning of the proposition in the past, present or future, from the time-perspective of the speaker; and different languages have quite different tense systems. A proposition consists of a predicate and varying numbers of arguments, or referring expressions. The number of arguments that accompany a particular predicate is called its valency (Kreidler 1998: 82).

Semantic roles describe the roles or functions involved in propositions or sentences. Semantic roles have also been called *semantic cases*, *thematic roles*, *participant roles*, or *thematic functions* by other linguists (Kreidler 1998: 82).

Instead of thinking of words as containers of meaning, we can look at the roles they fulfil within the situation described by a sentence. “If the situation is a simple event, as in *The boy kicked the ball*, then the verb describes an action (*kick*). The noun phrases in the sentence describe the roles of entities, such as people and things, involved in the action. We can identify a small number of semantic roles (also called “thematic roles”) for these noun phrases” (Yule 2010: 115).

Among the most important semantic roles we include:

- *Agent* = the entity that performs the action;
- *Theme* = the entity that undergoes the action;
- *Experiencer* = the one who perceives something;
- *Instrument* = an entity used to perform an action;
- *Location* = the place where the action happens;
- *Source* = the place from which an action originates;
- *Goal* = the place where the action is directed.

The nouns and noun phrases describe the role of entities (people or things) involved in the action, i.e. they have certain semantic (or thematic) roles. The semantic features of verbs determine the semantic/thematic roles played by the

referents of their complements, i.e. by the entities to which their complements refer. So, words are not just containers of meaning (features) but also fulfil roles in relation to the sentence.

In semantics, words are described according to the roles they fulfil with the situation described in a sentence.

E.g. in the sentence *The boy kicked the ball*, the verb *kicked* indicates action, the noun *boy* performs the action = agent, and the noun *ball* undergoes the action = theme.

In the sentence *John is writing with a pen*, *John* is the agent, *a pen* is the instrument.

In the sentence *Mary saw a mosquito on the wall*, *Mary* is the experiencer, *mosquito* is the theme, whereas *the wall* is the location.

In the sentence *The children ran from the classroom into the yard*, the *children* is the agent, *from the classroom* is the source, and *to the yard* is the goal.<sup>1</sup>

Agents and themes are the most common semantic roles. Although agents are typically human (*The boy*), they can also be non-human entities that cause actions, as in noun phrases denoting a natural force (*The wind*), a machine (*A car*), or a creature (*The dog*), all of which affect the ball as theme.  
*The boy kicked the ball.*

*The wind blew the ball away.*

*A car ran over the ball.*

*The dog caught the ball* (Yule 2010: 115).

If an agent uses another entity in order to perform an action, that other entity fills in the role of instrument.

In the sentences *The boy cut the rope with an old razor* and *He drew the picture with a crayon*, the noun phrases *an old razor* and *a crayon* are being used in the semantic role of instrument.

When a noun phrase is used to designate an entity as the person who has a feeling, perception or state, it fills the semantic role of experiencer. If we see, know or enjoy something, we're not really performing an action (hence we are not agents). We are in the role of experiencer. In the sentence *The boy feels sad*, the experiencer (*The boy*) is the only semantic role. In the question, *Did you hear that noise?*, the experiencer is *you* and the theme is *that noise* (Yule 2010: 116).

A number of other semantic roles designate where an entity is in the description of an event. Where an entity is (*on the table*, *in the room*) fills the role of location. Where the entity moves from is the source (*from Chicago*) and where it moves to is the goal (*to New Orleans*), as in *We drove from Chicago to New Orleans*. When we talk about transferring money from savings to checking, the source is savings and the goal is checking. All these semantic roles are illustrated in the following examples:

<sup>1</sup> Some of the examples have been adapted from Yule, 1996, 116–117.

Mary saw a fly on the wall.

EXPERIENCER THEME LOCATION

She borrowed a magazine from George.

AGENT THEME SOURCE

She squashed the bug with the magazine.

AGENT THEME INSTRUMENT

She handed the magazine back to George.

AGENT THEME GOAL

“Gee thanks”, said George (Yule 2010: 116).

Here is a presentation of the most important semantic/thematic roles, illustrated with further examples:<sup>2</sup>

1. Agent: the entity that performs an action (prototypically human, but not necessarily so).

*The boy ate his lunch.*

*The cat meowed pathetically.*

2. Theme: the entity that is affected by the action, involved in the action, or described by it.

*The boy ate his lunch.*

*A passing car injured the boy.*

*The wind blew the paper off the table.*

*The book is easy to read.*

*The man killed himself.*

3. Experiencer: the entity that has a perception or feeling or maintains a state.

*I feel happy.*

*She can't hear a thing.*

*These students know linguistics well.*

*Mary enjoyed the party.*

4. Instrument: the entity used by an agent in order to do something.

*He ate his soup with a spoon.*

*He went to London by bus.*

5. Location: where an entity is.

*There's a book on the coffee table.*

*The students exercise in the gym.*

6. Source: where an entity moves from (includes metaphorical origin).

*John travelled from Paris to Athens.*

*I borrowed a book from Peter.*

7. Goal: where an entity moves to (includes metaphorical destination/recipient).

*John travelled from Paris to Athens.*

*John gave the book to Mary.*

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<sup>2</sup> The examples have been adapted from Nikiforidou and Yule.



## THEORIES OF MEANING

Semiotics is usually defined as the science of various sign systems. The subject-matter of semantics and of pragmatics, though more difficult to grasp than that of other linguistic disciplines, is the study of meaning. The meaning of words cannot be derived from their physical properties, it cannot be reduced to the real-world objects or their perception, and it cannot be reduced to the particular image, concept, and idea in people's minds.

The meaning of words is to be derived from the relations between words, concepts and things in the real world. Words and linguistic signs have a representational or symbolic function (i.e. they are about something that goes beyond their physical shape). The symbolic function of linguistic signs crucially relies on the intentions of language users to use linguistic signs in order to communicate certain meanings to other language users. Any communication is only successful to the extent that the idea the hearer/reader gets is the same idea that the speaker/writer intends the hearer/reader to get.<sup>1</sup>

We will make a short presentation of taxonomies related to theories of meaning; we will refer to referential theories of meaning, structuralist theories (*lexical field theory, componential analysis, and relational semantics*), mentalistic or cognitive and conceptual theories of meaning (*the Prototype Theory, Fillmore's frame theory, Wierzbicka's semantic primitives*). We will also refer to Sorensen's classification of semantic theories (THING theories of meaning, which look upon language as a system of symbols, IDEA theories that view language through the knowledge and the mental representations of language users, and USE theories which consider language as usage, as social action that involves social content, social roles of participants, with specific communicative goals and intentions.)

### Theories of meaning – diachronically

When applying the criterion of historical evolution, theories of meaning may be briefly subdivided into model theoretic semantics, formal or truth-conditional semantics, conceptual semantics, lexical semantics, mentalistic or cognitive theories.

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<sup>1</sup> Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 11–12.

From the viewpoint of formal linguistic theories, semantics may be seen as evolving from generative-transformational semantics towards cognitive semantics.

### Referential theories of meaning

Referential theories of meaning have their roots in the philosophy of language, logic, and mathematics. The most important linguists and scholars who shaped these theories are: Gottlob Frege (1892), Bertrand Russell (1905), Alfred Tarski (1933, 1944), Peter Strawson (1950), and Richard Montague (1970).

Referential theories are concerned with the relation between expressions and the external world. They explain our knowledge of linguistic meaning, but they do not make any claims about the psychological or mental mechanisms which regulate the ways people actually know how linguistic expressions acquire meaning. Referential theories of meaning generally assume that meaning is reference to facts or objects in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, words and phrases refer to a variety of things in the world: objects and relations between individuals. The most fundamental semantic relation is denotation. *Reference* is also called *denotation*, *denotatum*, or *semantic value*. Referential theories consider meaning to be something outside the world itself, an extra-linguistic entity.

In semantics, the action of picking out or identifying individuals/locations with words is called *referring/denoting*. To some linguists, the terms *denote* and *refer* are synonymous.... To John Lyons, the terms *denote* and *refer* are not synonymous. The former is used to express the relationship linguistic expression–world, whereas the latter is used for the action of a speaker in picking out entities in the world.... In conclusion, *referring* is what speakers do and *denoting* is a property of words. Denotation is a stable relationship in a language; it doesn't depend on anyone's use of the word unlike the action of referring.<sup>3</sup>

In *referential/denotational theories of meaning*, the basic premise is that one can give the meaning of words and sentences by showing how they relate to situations – proper names denote individuals, nouns denote entities or sets of individuals, verbs denote actions, adverbs denote properties of actions, adjectives denote properties of individuals. In the case of sentences, they denote situations and events.

The impossibility of equating meaning with the object denoted by a given word can be explained considering three major reasons:

2 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 14.

3 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

a. the identity meaning-object would leave meaning to a large extent undefined because not all the characteristic traits of an object as an extra-linguistic reality are identical with the distinctive features of lexical meaning;

b. not all words have a referent in the outside world; there are:

- non-referring expressions: *so, very, maybe, if, not*, etc.

- referring expressions used generically: e.g. *A murder is a serious felony*.

- words like nouns, pronouns with variable reference depending on the context: e.g. *The president decides on the foreign policy. She didn't know what to say*.

- words which have no corresponding object in the real world in general or at a certain moment: e.g. *The unicorn is a mythical animal. She wants to make a cake this evening*.

- different expressions/words that can be used for the same referent, the meaning reflecting the perspective from which the referent is viewed: e.g. *the morning star is the same thing as the evening star*.<sup>4</sup>

In referential theories, the study of linguistic meanings may be based on the notion of *truth*. A referential theory of semantics that is based on the notion of truth in this way, stating that sentences denote their truth value, is called the truth-conditional theory of semantics.

Since the notion of 'true' is here used to indicate something like corresponding to the way the world is, truth-conditional theory of semantics assumes a *correspondence theory* of truth. ... A truth-conditional theory of semantics obeys the following dictum: To know the meaning of a (declarative) sentence is to know *what the world would have to be like* for the sentence to be true. To give the meaning of a sentence is to specify its truth conditions, i.e. to give necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of that sentence.<sup>5</sup>

Besides *the denotation* of a word (the cognitive or communicative aspect of meaning), *the connotations* (or emotional overtones speakers associate with individual uses of words) associated with it are also important.

Denotative meaning accounts for the relationship between the linguistic sign and its denotatum. But one shouldn't equate denotation with the denotatum. What is the denotation of a word which has no denotatum.... denotation is regarded as neutral, since its function is simply to convey the informational load carried by a word. The connotative aspects of meaning are highly subjective, springing from personal experiences, which a speaker has had of a given word and also from his/her attitude towards his/her utterance and/or towards the interlocutors. Given their highly

4 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

5 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 17–18.



individual nature, connotations seem to be unrepeatable but, on the other hand, in many instances, the social nature of individual experience makes some connotative shades of meaning shared by practically all the speakers of a language. It is very difficult to draw a hard line between denotation and connotation in meaning analysis, due to the fact that elements of connotation are drawn into what is referred to as basic, denotative meaning. By taking into account connotative overtones of meaning, its analysis has been introduced a new dimension, the pragmatic one.<sup>6</sup>

*The description theory* (Russel, Frege, Searle) states that name is taken as “a label or shorthand for knowledge about the referent or for one or more definite descriptions in the terminology of philosophers”.<sup>7</sup> In this theory, understanding a name and identifying the referent depend on associating the name with the right description: e.g. *Christopher Marlowe/the writer of the play Dr. Faustus/the Elizabethan playwright murdered in a Deptford tavern*.

The criticism of the referential theories of meaning may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Meaning, as understood in the referential approach, comprises the interrelation of linguistic signs with categories and phenomena outside the scope of language. As neither referents (i.e. actual things, phenomena, etc.) nor concepts belong to language, the analysis of meaning is confined either to the study of the interrelation of the linguistic sign and referent or that of the linguistic sign and concept, all of which, properly speaking, is not the object of linguistic study.
2. The great stumbling-block in referential theories of meaning has always been that they operate with subjective and intangible mental processes. The results of semantic investigation therefore depend to a certain extent on “the feel of the language” and cannot be verified by another investigator analysing the same linguistic data (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 16–17).

### Structuralist semantics

Among feature-based theories, we first mention the contribution of the functional-structuralist school (Prague Linguistics Circle; Ferninand de Saussure, Eugen Coseriu, Lucien Tesnière, Louis Hjelmslev, etc.).

The central idea of structuralism is the notion that language has to be seen as a system, and not just as a loose set of words.

Natural languages are symbolic systems with properties and principles of their own, and it is precisely those properties and principles that determine the way in which the linguistic sign functions as a sign. But what are the consequences of taking such a view of language? The outcome

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can be described both negatively and positively. Negatively speaking, the new structuralist paradigm will reject some of the crucial tenets of historical philological semantics: why exactly is it so different from what went before? From a more positive angle, it will introduce new ways of analyzing the lexicon: how exactly can you describe the semantics of natural language as a structure? (Geeraerts 2009: 53).

## Types of structuralist semantics

Among the large variety of theoretical positions and descriptive methods that emerged within the overall lines set out by a structuralist conception of meaning, three broad strands may be distinguished: *lexical field theory*, *componential analysis*, and *relational semantics*.

### Lexical field theory

Lexical field theory is basically a continental European approach that emerged and blossomed from 1930 to 1960, predominantly in the work of German and French scholars. Componential analysis as represented in the work of Eugenio Coseriu, Bernard Pottier, and Algirdas Greimas developed in the 1960s from the European tradition of lexical field research, but it seems to have materialized in parallel in the work of American anthropological linguists.

It was incorporated into generative grammar in the 1960s, when generative grammar began to dominate the scene of theoretical linguistics, and from there exerted a crucial influence on the subsequent development of semantics. Relational semantics as well came to the fore in the 1960s, through the work of the British scholar John Lyons, and like componential analysis, it was incorporated into mainstream theoretical linguistics via generative linguistics. In fact, the generativist description of lexical meaning that was developed by the American philosopher of language Jerrold J. Katz is probably the framework in which the underlying strands of structuralist semantics (the field and componential approach, on the one hand, the relational approach, on the other) are brought together most systematically.... Lexical fields as originally conceived are based on paradigmatic relations of similarity. For a considerable period in the development of structural linguistics, these syntagmatic affinities received less attention than the paradigmatic relations, but in the 1950s and 1960s, the concept surfaced under different names in structuralist and generativist semantics: Firth (1957) uses the term *collocation*, Katz and Fodor (1963) talk about *selection restrictions*, Weinreich (1966) mentions

transfer features, and Coseriu (1967) discusses *lexikalische Solidaritäten* ‘lexical solidarities’ (Geeraerts 2009: 61–62).

Lexical field theory is based upon the view that language constitutes an intermediate conceptual level between the mind and the world that inspired the metaphorical notion of a lexical field: “if you think of reality as a space of entities and events, language, so to speak, draws lines within that space, dividing up the field into conceptual plots. A lexical field, then, is a set of semantically related lexical items whose meanings are mutually interdependent and that together provide conceptual structure for a certain domain of reality” (Geeraerts 2009: 56).

The lexical items are analysed in terms of minimal semantic features (*semes*), which determine the structure of the lexicon paradigmatically and syntagmatically. Paradigmatically, the features allow the definition of what a certain group of words have in common and what differentiates them (distinctive features). The theory of lexical fields and componential analysis is the main contribution of this functional-structuralist approach.

The term *lexical field* was introduced by Jost Trier. The first major descriptive achievement of structuralist semantics is Jost Trier’s monograph of 1931 on the development of the German vocabulary in the Middle Ages. “Taking its inspiration from the structuralist conception of language that is basically associated with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, structuralist lexical semantics would be the main inspiration for innovation in word meaning research until well into the 1960s” (Geeraerts 2009: 52).

Lexical fields are groups of lexemes which share contiguous semantic content and which are mutually opposed by means of minimal distinctive features (definition of Coseriu, 1977 apud Batiukova<sup>8</sup>). The most important ideas proposed by this approach are the following:

- The meaning of a word depends on the meaning of the other words of the same lexical or conceptual field.
- If a single word undergoes a semantic change, then the whole structure of the lexical field changes.

Some drawbacks of the functional structuralist method: it follows the classical (Aristotelian) approach to categorization, which defines a category in terms of a set of necessary (all of them have to be satisfied) and sufficient criteria for membership. But the truth is that reality is not that clear-cut, and we still call *penguins* birds although they do not fly (a necessary condition is not satisfied).

This theory views concepts as lists of bits of knowledge: the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be an example of that concept. One major problem with this approach has been its assumption that if speakers share the same concept they will agree on the necessary and sufficient conditions: if

8 Olga Batiukova, *Semantics: the structure of concepts. Units of analysis in different theories of lexical semantics*. Downloaded from: [people.brandeis.edu/~smalamud/ling130/feature\\_based\\_theories.pdf](http://people.brandeis.edu/~smalamud/ling130/feature_based_theories.pdf).

something has them, it is an x; if not, not. But it has proved very difficult to set these up even for nouns which identify concrete and natural kinds like *dog* or *cat*, *zebra* if, by some birth defect, a three-legged zebra comes into the world, it would still be a zebra.<sup>9</sup>

## Componential analysis

An initial step in the direction of componential analysis can be found in the work of Hjelmslev (1953, 1958). Developing Saussure's notion of a language as a system of mutual relations,

Hjelmslev formulated a rigorous theory of linguistics that focused on just the pure relations constituting linguistic structure; the substance behind those relations was not relevant from a linguistic point of view. Practically speaking, however, Hjelmslev presents only a few simple examples of what the content *figurae* might imply, as when he analyzes *ram* as 'he-sheep' and *ewe* as 'she-sheep', *boy* as 'he-child' and *girl* as 'she-child', *stallion* as 'he-horse' and *mare* as 'she-horse' (Geeraerts 2009: 73).

The full development of componential analysis within European semantics does not emerge before the early sixties, in the work of Pottier (1964, 1965), Coseriu (1962, 1964, 1967), and Greimas (1966) (see the chapter dedicated to componential analysis).

## Relational semantics

However, structuralism is interested in the structure of the language rather than the structure of the world outside of language,

and so it may want to use a different type of descriptive apparatus, one that is more purely linguistic. Relational semantics looks for such an apparatus in the form of lexical relations like synonymy (identity of meaning) and antonymy (oppositeness of meaning): the fact that aunt and uncle refer to the same genealogical generation is a fact about the world, but the fact that black and white are opposites is a fact about words and language (Geeraerts 2009: 56–67).

A broad distinction can be drawn between structural semantics and generative semantic theories (in the wider sense). Although such simplifying labels may be misleading, they are useful and necessary in giving a general survey. Structural semantics is mainly concerned with word semantics, while semantics in generative grammars often deals

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with sentence semantics. The former, however, is not confined to isolated items, but has focused on lexical fields and paradigmatic semantic relations between words generally. Within generative grammar, two schools of thought can be distinguished, namely the so-called Interpret(at)ive Semantics and Generative Semantics. Scholars of the former group (Katz, Fodor, Chomsky, Jackendoff) focus on the syntagmatic semantic relations, while those of the latter (McCawley, Postal, Lakoff) argue for lexical decomposition and are thus largely limited to word semantics (Lipka 1992: 53).

## **Mentalistic or cognitive and conceptual theories of meaning**

### **Cognitive semantics**

The 1960s witnessed the emergence and spread of structural-functional approaches in semantic studies. The 1970s and early 1980s brought about the generative tendencies in linguistics. Toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, starting from the second half of the 1980s, the era of cognitive semantics began.

Cognitive linguists often point to a division between formal and functional approaches to language. Formal approaches, such as *generative grammar*, are often associated with a certain view of language and cognition: that knowledge of linguistic structures and rules forms an autonomous module (faculty), independent of other mental processes of attention, memory and reasoning. This external view of an independent linguistic module is often combined with a view of internal modularity: that different levels of linguistic analysis, such as phonology, syntax and semantics, form independent modules. Functionalism, with which cognitive linguists identify themselves, implies a quite different view of language: that externally, principles of language use embody more general cognitive principles; and internally, that explanation must cross boundaries between levels and analysis. Thus, it makes sense to look for principles shared across a range of cognitive domains. Similarly, it is argued that no adequate account of grammatical rules is possible without taking the meaning of elements into account.

This general difference of approach underlies specific positions taken by cognitive linguists on a number of issues: in each case, their approach seeks to break down the abstractions and specializations characteristic of formalism. Studies in cognitive semantics have tended to blur, if not ignore, the commonly made distinctions between linguistic knowledge and encyclopaedic, real-world knowledge and between literal and figurative

language. Cognitive linguists consider that syntax can never be autonomous from semantics or pragmatics. So, the explanation of grammatical patterns cannot be given in terms of abstract syntactic principles but only in terms of the speaker's intended meaning in particular contexts of language use.<sup>10</sup>

Cognitive semantics rejects the idea of objectivist semantics,<sup>11</sup> the view that the symbols of language are meaningful because they are associated with some objective categories.

In cognitive semantics, "meaning is based on conventionalized conceptual structures. Thus, semantic structure, along with other cognitive domains, reflects the mental categories which people have formed from their experience of growing up and acting in the world".<sup>12</sup>

Special attention is often paid to metaphor, which is an essential element in people's categorization of the world and their thinking processes.

Metaphor is seen as related to other fundamental structures such as *image schemas*, which provide a kind of basic conceptual framework derived from perception and bodily experience, and Fauconnier's notion of *mental spaces*, which are mental structures which speakers set up to manipulate reference to entities. ...A consequence of this view of language is that the study of semantics and linguistics must be an interdisciplinary activity.<sup>13</sup>

Cognitive and conceptual semantic theories arose partly as a critique of formal semantics and were partly inspired by certain developments in the field of cognitive science in the 1970s: mainly psychology, artificial intelligence, computer science, and anthropology. In linguistics, there have been developed various forms, as represented in the work of Charles Fillmore, Ray Jackendoff, George Lakoff, Ronald Langacker, Leonard Talmy, and Anna Wierzbicka.

There is a variety of mentalistic, or cognitive and conceptual semantic theories that are concerned with speakers' psychological grasp of the meanings of expressions of their language, rather than with the relation between expressions and the (possible) world(s), as abstract mathematical objects, as in referential theories of meaning. What matters is how the world is presented, the projected world, the world construed by means of linguistic expressions. Emphasis is on the way in which our reports about reality are influenced by the conceptual structures inherent in our language.<sup>14</sup>

10 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

11 Lakoff (1988: 125–126) talks about three types of objectivist semantics: The doctrine of truth-conditional meaning: Meaning is based on reference and truth; The "correspondence theory" of truth: Truth consists in the correspondence between symbols and states of affairs in the world; The doctrine of objective reference: There is an "objectively correct" way to associate symbols with things in the world.

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13 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

14 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: *ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\_1\_What\_is\_meaning.pdf*. 23.

The basic assumption of cognitive semantics is that meanings are represented in people's mind in a representation format that has its own rules and interacts with other human capabilities, such as visual perception and drawing logical conclusions. The objective and aim of cognitive and conceptual types of semantic theories is to relate linguistic expressions (words, sentences, and their meanings) to their cognitive, mental, and/or psychological representations.<sup>15</sup>

Problems for cognitive/conceptual semantics:

(a) Cognitive or mental representations of certain types of words can be thought of as a mental image or idea formed by someone who understands it. This seems to be pretty straightforward for many nouns denoting concrete entities like people or objects. However, there are many words like *only*, *just*, and also negation, complex noun phrases, quantifiers, etc. that cannot be easily represented within cognitive/conceptual semantics.<sup>16</sup>

The trouble with a mentalistic theory of meaning is, first, that not all words can be associated with mental images and some words have a range of meaning greater than any single association (Kreidler 1998: 43). We must mention, in this sense, the case of *loaded words* or of connotations which many-many words carry – the affective or emotional associations which clearly need not be the same for all people who know and use the word. When lexemes are highly charged with connotations, we call them *loaded words*.

The word *dog* has a certain denotation, but it may have several connotations in different cultures. Hjelmslev pointed out that among the Eskimos a dog is an animal that is used for pulling a sled, the Parsees regard dogs as nearly sacred, Hindus consider them a great pest and in Western Europe and America some members of the species still perform the original chores of hunting and guarding while others are merely 'pets'. Hjelmslev might have added that in certain societies the flesh of dogs is part of the human diet and in other societies it is not. The meaning of *dog* includes the attitudes of a society and of individuals, the pragmatic aspect. It would be wrong to think that a purely biological definition of the lexeme *dog* is a sufficient account of its meaning (Kreidler 1998: 44–45).

15 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 23.

16 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 30.



## The prototype theory

Cognitive semantics studies the reflection of linguistic units into the more general cognitive domain. Prototype theory is a special kind of cognitive theory of meaning, which is based on the notion of *prototype*, proposed as a psychological approach to categorization by Eleanor Rosch. The Rosch theory and her experiments have to do with what we have in mind when we use words which refer to categories:

Let's take the word 'red' as an example. Close your eyes and imagine a true red.

Now imagine an orangish red... imagine a purple red. Although you might still name the orange red or the purple red with the term red, they are not as good examples of red... as the clear 'true' red. In short, some reds are redder than others. The same is true for other kinds of categories. Think of dogs. You all have some notion of what a 'real dog', a 'doggy dog' is. To me a retriever or a German shepherd is a very doggy dog while a Pekinese is a less doggy dog. Notice that this kind of judgment has nothing to do with how well you like the thing; you can like a purple red better than a true red but still recognize that the color you like is not a true red. You may prefer to own a Pekinese without thinking that it is the breed that best represents what people mean by dogginess.<sup>17</sup>

The idea of semantic *prototypicality* is based on the idea that in all the semantic relationships that words enter, there is often a notion that there is a basic, normative, or default word against which the related words are measured. Basic terms tend to be etymologically ancient and persistent, even resisting newer and potentially displacing alternatives. As Mullany–Stockwell put it:

We seem to carry around notions of the best examples of categories, on the basis of previous experience and cultural habit: so a *dog* is a good central example of an everyday and familiar animal, and the conceptual level of 'dog-ness' is the most familiar and easiest way of thinking about those objects in the world most of the time.

Higher-level terms ('mammal' and so on) are too abstract, whereas subordinate terms ('poodle' and so on) are overly specific, most of the time. Sometimes, of course, 'mammal' or 'poodle' will be normal. Within the *dog* domain, a terrier or a collie is, for us, a good example of a dog. A poodle or a dingo is a less good example, in terms of our cultural prototypicality judgement. In fact, dingoes and wolves are peripheral examples of dogs for us, moving outwards to hyenas, coyotes, foxes and other doglike semi-dogs in our minds. Note that these judgements

17 Olga Batiukova, *Semantics: the structure of concepts. Units of analysis in different theories of lexical semantics*. Downloaded from: [people.brandeis.edu/~smalamud/ling130/feature\\_based\\_theories.pdf](http://people.brandeis.edu/~smalamud/ling130/feature_based_theories.pdf)



have nothing to do with scientific classification. Next outward along the radial prototypicality structure of dogs would be wolverines, badgers, ferrets and weasels. Beyond them would be very poor examples of dogs, like panthers, cheetahs, lions and other technically non-dog mammals (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 67).

A prototype “is an object which is held to be very typical of the kind of object which can be referred to by an expression containing the predicate” (Hurford et alii 2007: 87). For example, a man of medium height and average build, between 30 and 50 years old, with brownish hair, with no particularly distinctive characteristics or defects, could be a prototype of the predicate *man* in certain areas of the world, a dwarf or an oversized person would certainly not function as prototypes.

Prototype is the most prominent (central) representative of a category, displaying a set of typical properties (this set of properties is not to be confused with necessary and sufficient conditions) of a category (e.g. for the category ‘bird’: ‘be able to fly’, ‘be oviparous’, ‘have feathers’, ‘have wings’, ‘have a beak’). “People probably decide on the extent to which something is a member of a category by matching it against the features of the prototype. It does not have to match exactly; it just has to be sufficiently similar, though not necessarily visually similar. Some features will have a greater effect on determining centrality in the category than others.”<sup>18</sup>

According to prototype theory, the category is structured on two dimensions: the *horizontal dimension* (the internal structure) and the *vertical dimension* (intercategorical relations).

*The Horizontal Dimension.* The prototype is the best exemplar, the central instance of a category. This new conception is based on the following principles:

1. The category has an internal prototypical structure.
2. The borderlines of the categories or concepts are not very clearly delimited, they are vague.
3. Not all the members of a category present common characteristics; they are grouped together on the basis of the *family resemblance*.
4. An entity is a member of a certain category if it presents similarities with the prototype.

So, this approach allows for borderline uncertainty: an item in the world might bear some resemblance to two different prototypes. Here we might give examples of speakers being able to use the word *whale*, yet being unsure about whether a whale is a mammal or a fish. In the prototype theory of concepts, this might be explained by the fact that whales are not typical of the category *mammal*, being far from the central prototype. At

18 Olga Batiukova, *Semantics: the structure of concepts. Units of analysis in different theories of lexical semantics*. Downloaded from: [people.brandeis.edu/~smalamud/ling130/feature\\_based\\_theories.pdf](http://people.brandeis.edu/~smalamud/ling130/feature_based_theories.pdf).

the same time, whales resemble prototypical fish in some characteristic features: they live underwater in the oceans, have fins, etc.<sup>19</sup>

### The vertical dimension

Words are in a network of semantic links with other words, and it is reasonable to assume that conceptual structures are similarly linked. Thus, semantic studies also focus on the relational nature of our knowledge of concepts.

Proponents of prototype theory have also investigated conceptual hierarchies and have proposed that such hierarchies contain three levels of generality:

a *superordinate* level, a *basic level*, and a *subordinate level*. The idea is that the levels differ in their balance between informativeness and usefulness. If we take one of Rosch et al.'s examples, that of *furniture*, the superordinate level is *furniture*, which has relatively few characteristic features; the basic level would include concepts like *chair*; which has more features, and the subordinate level would include concepts like *armchair*, *dining-chair*, etc., which have still more features and are thus more specific again. The basic level is identified as cognitively important; it is the level that is most used in everyday life; it is acquired first by children; in experiments, it is at which adults spontaneously name objects; such objects are recognized more quickly in tests, and so on.<sup>20</sup>

Since we are not especially interested in the language of any one individual, but rather in language as a whole, Hurford et alii prefer to talk in terms of *shared prototypes*, i.e. objects on which there would be general agreement that they were typical examples of the class of objects described by a certain predicate.

In a language community as wide as that of English, there are problems with this idea of prototype, due to cultural differences between various English speaking communities. Could a *double-decker bus* (of the kind found in British cities) be a prototype for the predicate *bus* for a British English-speaker? Could such a bus be a prototype for the predicate *bus* for an American English speaker?

The idea of a prototype is perhaps most useful in explaining how people learn to use (some of) the predicates in their language correctly. Recent research on the acquisition of categories in human language indicates that the prototypical members of the extension of a predicate are usually learned earlier than non-prototypical members. Predicates like *man*, *cat*, *dog* are often first taught to toddlers by pointing out to them typical examples of men, cats, dogs, etc. A mother may point to a cat and tell her child 'That's a cat', or point to the child's father and say 'Daddy's a man'. This kind of definition by pointing is called ostensive definition. It is very

19 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

20 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

plausible to believe that a child's first concepts of many concrete terms are induced by ostensive definition involving a prototype (Hurford et alii 2007: 89).

G. Kleiber (1990) speaks about two kinds of prototype theory: *the standard theory* and the *extended theory*. The standard theory corresponds to the period when E. Rosch and her team published their work (1973, 1975, 1975, 1976). However, besides standard prototype theory, Kleiber talks about a second version, which he calls *extended prototype theory*, which is interesting because it sheds light on the relationship between linguistic knowledge and encyclopaedic knowledge. Let us take a look at Fillmore's extended prototype theory or frame theory.

### Fillmore's frame theory

One important role in extended prototype theory is played by the assumption that Charles Fillmore expresses as follows: words and other linguistic units up to the sentence level are interpreted against the background of *frames*. Fillmore introduced the notion of a *frame* in 1975.

*A frame* is a script-like (conceptual) structure of inferences, linked by linguistic convention to the meanings of linguistic units, including individual lexical items.

Each frame identifies a set of frame elements (FEs) – participants and props in the frame. A frame-semantic description of a lexical item identifies the frames which underlie a given meaning and specifies the ways in which FEs, and constellations of FEs, are realized in structures headed by the word.... Fillmore's notion of 'frame' roughly corresponds to the notion of a 'prototype' or 'exemplar'... Linguistically encoded categories (not just words and fixed phrases, but also various kinds of grammatical features and syntactic patterns) presuppose particular structured understandings of cultural institutions, beliefs about the world, shared experiences, standard or familiar ways of doing things and ways of seeing things. Lexical items can be seen as serving discriminating, situating, classifying, or naming functions, or perhaps merely a category acknowledging function, within, or against the background of, such structures.<sup>21</sup>

Charles Fillmore claims that speakers have folk theories about the world, they picture the world against the background of their experience, and this ethnographic theory upon the world is deeply rooted in their culture.

These theories are called *frames* by Fillmore and *idealized cognitive models* (ICM) by Lakoff. They are not scientific theories or logically consistent definitions, but collections of cultural views. Fillmore gives an example

21 Hana Filip, *Introduction to natural language semantics. What is semantics about?* Downloaded from: [ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter\\_1\\_What\\_is\\_meaning.pdf](http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/doubtfire/Semantics/Chapter_1_What_is_meaning.pdf). 26–28.

of how these folk theories might work by using the word *bachelor*. It is clear that some bachelors are more prototypical than others, with the Pope, for example, being far from prototypical. Fillmore and Lakoff suggest that there is a division of our knowledge about the word *bachelor*: part is a *dictionary*-type definition (“an unmarried man”) and part is an *encyclopaedia*-type entry of cultural knowledge about bachelorhood and marriage – the frame or ICM. The first we can call *linguistic* or *semantic knowledge* and the second *real world* or *general knowledge*. Their point is we only apply the word *bachelor* within a typical marriage ICM: a monogamous union between eligible people, typically involving romantic love, etc. It is this idealized model, a form of general knowledge, which governs our use of the word *bachelor* and restrains us from applying it to celibate priests, or people living in isolation like Tarzan living among apes in the jungle.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, a semantic feature analysis of a term like *bachelor* as: [+ADULT, – FEMALE, –MARRIED] is problematic because it would include individuals which we would not normally refer to as *bachelors*: “e.g. an adult male living with his girlfriend, Tarzan, John Paul II, a male homosexual living with his boyfriend. *Bachelor* is defined with respect to a *frame/domain* in which there is a human society with (typically monogamous) marriage, and a typical marriageable age. It is questionable whether this kind of information can be represented in terms of semantic features”.<sup>23</sup>

**Conceptual/Representational Theory of Meaning** proposes to define meaning in terms of the notion, the concept or the mental image of the object or situation in reality as reflected in man’s mind. The most famous contributor is Ray Jackendoff in his model of Conceptual Semantics.

There are three elements involved in any semiotic act – *the sign*, *the sense*, and *the signification*.

Two distinguishable aspects of the content side of the sign can be postulated – its *signification*, the real object or situation denoted by the sign, i.e. its denotation and *a sense* which expresses a certain informational content on the object or situation. The relation between a proper name and what it denotes is called *name relation* and the thing denoted is called *denotation*. A name names its denotation and expresses its sense.<sup>24</sup>

22 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

23 Florian Haas, *Introduction to linguistics – Basic questions, concepts and methods*. Downloaded from: [http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207\\_SemI.pdf](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%207_SemI.pdf) and *userpage.fu-berlin.de/~flohaas/Handout%208\_SemII.pdf*. 3.

24 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

## Wierzbicka's semantic primitives

One type of conceptual or representational theory of meaning was proposed by Anna Wierzbicka. The Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach originated by Wierzbicka (1972) and developed in numerous books is the most advanced attempt in contemporary semantics to establish an inventory of universal primitive concepts. The central idea of this theory is that there is a set of semantic primitives, a set of words which help define all the other words. Wierzbicka's model of semantic primitives as part of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage runs into sixty. The set includes the following classes and items:

substantives: I, YOU, SOMEONE/PERSON, SOMETHING, THING, PEOPLE, BODY

relational substantives: KIND, PART

determiners: THIS, THE SAME, OTHER/ELSE

quantifiers: ONE, TWO, MUCH/MANY, SOME, ALL

evaluators: GOOD, BAD

descriptors: BIG, SMALL

mental/experiential predicates: THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR  
speech: SAY, WORDS, TRUE

actions, events, movement, contact: DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH

location, existence, possession, specification: BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS/EXIST, HAVE, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING)

life and death: LIVE, DIE

time: WHEN/TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, MOMENT

space: WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE

logical concepts: NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF

augmentor, intensifier: VERY, MORE

similarity: LIKE (Geeraerts 2009: 119–120).

Whereas the semantic primitives can be used to define other members of the vocabulary of a language, the primitives themselves are impossible to be defined in terms of anything simpler.

Semantic analysis in NSM thus consists in explaining a definiendum in simpler and more comprehensible terms than the definiendum itself. The 58 semantic primitives are supposed to represent the simplest possible explanatory terms, which cannot themselves be explained by anything simpler. ... NSM theory claims that the indefinable nature of its primitives derives from their status as *conceptual* primitives: the primitives are hypothesized, in other words, to express the set of 'fundamental human concepts', considered to be both innate and universal. What this means is that every natural language possesses an identical semantic core of primitive concepts from which all the other lexicalized concepts of the

language can be built up. Since this common core is absolutely universal, it can be stated in any language, and NSM scholars have devoted considerable energy to testing the list of primitives reproduced above in order to confirm that every language does, indeed, have an 'exponent' of each suggested primitive (Riemer 2010: 72–73).

Among the many definitions proposed in NSM are those of *sun* and *watch*: e.g. *sun*: something people can often see this something in the sky; when this something is in the sky, people can see other things because of this; when this something is in the sky, people often feel something because of this (Wierzbicka apud Riemer 2010: 72).

As Geeraerts states:

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach originated by Anna Wierzbicka (1972) and developed in numerous books (among them Wierzbicka 1985, 1992, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2003; Goddard and Wierzbicka 1994, 2002) is the most advanced attempt in contemporary semantics to establish an inventory of universal primitive concepts. Wierzbicka's model of semantic description rests on two pillars, in fact: the vocabulary of universal, primitive concepts, and a definitional practice characterized as reductive paraphrase (Geeraerts 2009: 119).

As we have seen so far, the list of primitives and quasi-primitives is relatively short and includes terms such as *I, you, something, somebody, thus, everything, two, to say, to want, not to want, to feel, to think, to know, to be able, to do, to happen, good, bad, similar, the same, where, when, after, because of*, etc. Anna Wierzbicka's theory specifically stresses the *anthropomorphic dimension of the language*, according to which the man – his body, his everyday activity – acts as a structuring principle of concepts and related words (e.g. the expressions *neck of a bottle, handful of people, or mouth of the tunnel*). It seems clear that this theory of semantics tries to restrict the language of definitions to a set of universal or language-specific semantic primitives, but these attempts are faced with many difficulties. "Not least of these is the extreme difficulty in accurately defining words: whether based on semantic primitives or not, no fully accurate definition of a word has ever been advanced in linguistics" (Riemer 2010: 72).

### **Some more taxonomies of meaning theories**

Relying on Stainton's definition of language, according to which language is a system of symbols which we know and use, Daniela Sorea makes an attempt at listing the main theories of meaning that are operating today, theories that are grouped in three families, based on the relationship between word and world, between verbal meaning and background knowledge. Thus, we can refer to three families of meaning theories, namely:

- THING theories (that look upon language as a system of symbols);
- IDEA theories (that view language through the knowledge and the mental representations of language users);
- USE theories (which consider language as usage, as social action that involves social content, social roles of participants, with specific communicative goals and intentions) (Sorea 2007: 17).

**1. THING theories** of meaning are based on the idea that meaning is a matter of the relations between symbols and extra-linguistic items.

*Direct reference theories* of meaning are the first subcategory of thing theories. Direct reference theories state that there is nothing that mediates between words and the objects that they refer to in the world, i.e. any word corresponds to an external object, and the meaning of a name is its bearer. “The denotation of any expression thus becomes the thing named, i.e. the thing which the expression designates or stands for. For such theories to function, each meaningful expression needs being assigned a specific referent or extra-linguistic object” (Sorea 2007: 18). Thing theories focus on denotation, on denotative meaning, and on the denotative value of words. The truth value of words and sentences is indicated by the correspondence of sentences with extra-linguistic facts. Direct reference theories rely on testing sentences for their truth or falsity by means of experience. Therefore, if the source of meaning is experience, the sentences whose meaning cannot be checked by means of direct experience are likely to be considered meaningless.

*Mediated reference theories* are the second subcategory of thing theories of meaning. These theories focus on the correspondence between signs, objects, and mental representations. Among the most important notions we should mention Frege’s distinction between *sense* and *reference*. The sense, according to Frege, is the concept or definition speakers mentally activate when understanding what terms mean. Reference, on the contrary, is the object denoted by the term (for instance, the sense of the term *cat* is the idea of cattiness, while its referent is the total amount of domestic felines).

Terms may have different senses, even when referring to the same object: Marilyn Monroe and Norma Jean Baker do not have the same sense, just as Eminem and Marshall Mathers. Although, in both cases, the two names refer to the same person, they display different senses: one designates the stage persona, the public figure, while the other the legal persona. “Consequently, if the sense of a term is specified by means of a description, then the reference of a term is whatever satisfies the description granting sense to the term. Sense, then, mediates between a sign and what the sign refers to. ... Mediated reference theories view words in relation to sense rather than reference, starting from the premise that sense always determines reference” (Sorea 2007: 19–20).



**2. IDEA theories** of meaning rely on the idea that meaning derives from inside the mind rather than from entities in the world. They claim that linguistic meaning emerges from the pairing of expressions with something in the mind: the meaning of a symbol is what people mentally grasp in understanding it.

*The mental image version* is the first subcategory of idea theories of meaning. It claims that meanings derive from pictures in the head. Mentalist views of meaning were shared by David Hume, Edward Bradford Titchener. This latter claimed that there was a fixed image to correspond to each and every word. These theories based on the mental images and representations have a series of flaws, among which we mention the fact that not all meanings can be represented by mental images. Very often, some associations between words and mental meanings are culture-specific (see the meaning and mental representation of the term *meat* with meat eaters, vegetarians, or Muslims).

*The intention-based theory of meaning* is the second subcategory of idea theories. It was promoted by Paul Grice, who made a distinction between “natural meaning, arising from a causal or logical relation between two signs, and non-natural meaning, a matter of social convention, bearing no factive or causal-logical relation between signs” (Sorea 2007: 22). According to Grice, non-natural or conventional linguistic meaning is cashed out in terms of speaker’s meaning, which is cashed out in terms of speaker’s intention. Intention, for Grice, is whatever is meant by the speaker, beyond or in addition to what is explicitly said. Thus, meaning arises from pairing utterances with intentions.

*LOT theories* constitute the third subcategory of idea theories of meaning. LOT is the acronym for *language of thought*. These theories consider public words and sentences meaningful because they are paired with internal words and sentences, with certain expressions of the language of thought or *mentalese*. “Fodor views mental representations as ideas in the head, more likely to be sentence-like than picture-like. In his outlook, when one learns the meaning of an expression in a public language, one translates it into their LOT. A public symbol is meaningful if it corresponds to some expressions in mentalese. If the public symbol in question fails to trigger a mental, sentence-like expression, it is to be judged as meaningless” (Sorea 2007: 23).

**3. The USE theory of meaning** belongs to the domain of pragmatics; it does not analyse meaning as an exclusively mental representation or as a relation between a symbol (word, phrase, sentence, text) and a worldly entity designated by it. Pragmatics looks upon language within its wider social and cultural setting, focusing heavily on the issue and role of context. Pragmatics “deals with the way people exploit words and combinations of words, with the actions actual users perform in the act of communication. The meaning of a linguistic expression is given by its



use, under certain circumstances, where interlocutors nourish specific intentions and pursue specific goals” (Sorea 2007: 24).

Use theory of meaning is basically the view that a word’s meaning consists simply in the way it is used. It has been advanced,

in different forms, by behaviourist psychologists such as Skinner (1957), and linguists such as Bloomfield (1933). (A rather different, non-behaviourist use theory was advanced by Wittgenstein 1953.) Behaviourist proponents of the use theory typically reject the very notion that words have hidden, unobservable properties called meanings: since meanings are inherently unobservable, it is, they would claim, unscientific to use them in explanations. (This argument would no longer be accepted by philosophers of science: scientific explanation *usually* involves unobservables.) Use theorists have claimed that the only objective, scientific way to explain language is to avoid postulating unobservable objects called meanings, and to attend only to what may actually be observed, the particular sequences of words and expressions that occur in actual examples of language use, and to describe the relation between these linguistic forms and the situations in which they are used (Riemer 2010: 35).

*Saying and doing* as communicative acts refers to a pragmatic theory of meaning that does not share the view of truth-conditional or verificationist theories (which claim that meaning is truth). Pragmatic accounts consider meaning context-dependent, linked to the networks of actions and the potential effects such actions may generate. According to Strawson, meaning is more than reference and is not solely used to describe the world (lack of reference does not always entail lack of meaning). Austin also rejects – in his *How to do things with words* – the idea that description is the only function of language. “Austin regards each utterance as an act of communication or a speech act. Pragmatics is the science that analyses speech acts as major units of human communication by engaging along two directions of investigation:

- a) pairing linguistic expressions with speech acts or action types
- b) specifying the context that allows a certain utterance to lead to the actual performance of the intended action” (Sorea 2007: 25).

#### *Interactivity and context-dependence*

Interactivity refers to the simultaneous contribution of at least two interlocutors to the successful performance of a speech act. To understand language and to identify meaning implicitly means to understand the context, and, in a larger investigation, the culture to which utterances belong to. Meaning emerges from specific contexts of situation. Meaning relations have been defined by Sorea as “multidimensional and functional sets of relations between words or word combinations and the contexts of their occurrence. Word meaning is not contained in the word and it is not the essence of the word, but lies in the

use of a word in a situation. Words are not receptacles of thought, but the other way round: it is thought that depends on language and ultimately on the actions performed by means of language” (Sorea 2007: 26).

Identifying context correctly and placing words in the proper context is essential when translating from one language into another. When transferring meaning from source language to target language, mistranslations might occur if the translator fails to locate context correctly or to spot literal and figurative meaning.



## TYPES OF MEANING

Semantics is the branch of linguistics which studies the meaning of words (lexical semantics) and the meaning of phrases/sentences, and looks at how the meaning of a phrase/sentence can be derived from the meanings of its component parts. The meanings of words in a language are interrelated and they are defined by their relations with other words in the language. Meaning is a complex issue.

While semantics is the study of meaning in language, there is more interest in certain aspects of meaning than in others. We have already ruled out special meanings that one individual might attach to words. We can go further and make a broad distinction between conceptual meaning and associative meaning. Conceptual meaning covers those basic, essential components of meaning that are conveyed by the literal use of a word. It is the type of meaning that dictionaries are designed to describe. 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.

However, different people might have different associations or connotations attached to a word like *needle*. They might associate it with “pain,” or “illness,” or “blood,” or “drugs,” or “thread,” or “knitting,” or “hard to find” (especially in a haystack), and these associations may differ from one person to the next. These types of associations are not treated as part of the word’s conceptual meaning.

In a similar way, some people may associate the expression *low-calorie*, when used to describe a product, with “healthy,” but this is not part of the basic conceptual meaning of the expression (i.e. “producing a small amount of heat or energy”).

Poets, song-writers, novelists, literary critics, advertisers and lovers may all be interested in how words can evoke certain aspects of associative meaning, but in linguistic semantics we’re more concerned with trying to analyze conceptual meaning (Yule 2010: 113).

In this chapter, we will try to distinguish between lexical meaning vs grammatical meaning, on the one hand, and we will present three major taxonomies related to types of meaning: Finegan’s taxonomy, Leech’s taxonomy, and Vizental’s taxonomy.

The most important types of meaning are:

1. Conceptual meaning (or *sense*), also called logical, cognitive, or denotative content;

2. Associative meanings, among which we mention: connotative meaning (what is communicated by virtue of what language refers to: e.g. *female* = soft, caring, likely to cry, cooking); social or stylistic meaning (what is communicated of the social circumstances of language use: *domicile* – *residence* – *abode* – *home*; *cast* – *throw* – *chuck*); affective meaning (what is communicated of the feelings and attitudes of the speaker/writer: *will you belt up* [+intonation]); reflected meaning (what is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression: *intercourse*, *erection*, *gay*); collocative meaning (what is communicated through association with words which tend to occur in the environment of another word: *heavy smoker*, *rain*, *fine*; *pretty* vs. *handsome*); thematic meaning (what is communicated by the way in which the message is organized in terms of order and emphasis: *She donated the first prize/The first prize was donated by her*).<sup>1</sup>

The classifications scholars have created in the topic of types of meanings are numerous and that is why we shall try to make a synthesis of these approaches. First, we will have to distinguish *conceptual* (propositional or referential) meaning = the basic, core meaning of a word, which determines its reference, from *associative* (or non-propositional, or affective) meanings = the associations, connotations attached to a word, the encyclopaedic part of its meaning:

e.g. *needle*: conceptual meaning: “thin, sharp, steel instrument mostly used for sowing”; associative meaning: pain, blood, drugs, hard to find, etc.

In the topic of this first distinction, i.e. *conceptual* versus *associative meanings*, George Yule has written the following: “When linguists investigate the meaning of words in a language, they are normally interested in characterizing the *conceptual* meaning and less concerned with the *associative* or stylistic meaning of words. ... Poets and advertisers are, of course, very interested in using terms in such a way that their associative meanings are evoked, and some linguists do investigate this aspect of language use” (Yule 1996: 114–115).

Words do not always have only conceptual meanings; they also have connotations and associations.

A word will also, of course, have very many looser and perhaps more culturally defined *associations*: ‘red’ and ‘reds’ associates, in different places around the world, with several British soccer teams wearing red shirts, with communists, with US Republican states, with roads of a particularly high accident rate, with embarrassment, with Marlboro strong cigarettes, with food labelling of a high fat and sugar content, with air squadron identifiers, with ginger hair, with prostitution, with a certain

1 Source: Leech, Geoffrey (1981). *Semantics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 23. apud Nikiforidou.

type of civic university, with the car maker Ferrari, and many others. Some associations might be very personal and idiosyncratic. However, all of these senses can be said to be part of the meaning of the word. The study of the meanings of words and their relationships is *lexical semantics* (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 64).

First, we will make a presentation of these two main types of meaning – conceptual (lexical and grammatical) meaning and associative meanings –, showing that meaning is not restricted to the level of words as we may talk about meaning at the level of sounds, morphemes, words, word combinations, and sentences as well.

## Levels of meaning

### Lexical vs grammatical meaning

1. Grammatical meaning of words is the component of meaning recurrent in identical sets of individual forms of different words as, for instance, the tense meaning in the word forms of verbs (*asked, thought, walked, etc.*) or the case meaning in the word forms of various nouns (*girl's, boy's, night's, etc.*), grammatical meaning of plurality in nouns such as *girls, winters, joys, tables*.

2. Lexical meaning is the component of meaning proper to the word as a linguistic unit, i.e. recurrent in all the forms of this word. The word forms *go, goes, went, going, and gone* possess different grammatical meanings of tense, person, and so on, but in each of these forms we find one and the same semantic component denoting the process of movement (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 19).

Lexical meaning is the meaning proper to the given linguistic unit in all its forms and distributions, while grammatical meaning refers to the meaning proper to sets of word forms common to all words of a certain class. Both the lexical and the grammatical meaning make up the word meaning, as neither can exist without the other.

We shall approach the problem of meaning not only at word level, as there is meaning involved below and above the level of words. We will focus on the grammatical and the lexical meanings which can be found in words and word components or word combinations.

### Meanings below the morpheme: sound symbolism

The sound /i/ tends to be associated with small things. Most diminutives are formed with this sound in many different languages.

e.g. *-(t)je* (Dutch) *-ling, -ie, -y* (English), *-ino* (Italian) *-cik* (Turkish), *-ito/a* (Spanish) *ki-* (Swahili), *-chik* (Russian), etc.

The reason for this, it seems, lies in the way in which this sound is produced (to utter the phoneme /i/, we have to raise the tongue and leave a very small space in our mouth; the contrast between this sound and /o/ is evident).<sup>2</sup>

What is more, the words expressing the idea of smallness use this sound frequently:

- *little* (English);
- *petit* (French);
- *kicsi, pici* (Hungarian);
- *mic, pitic* (Romanian).

Another example of a certain relationship between sound and meaning is to be found in phenomena such as “*onomatopoeia* (roughly, the linguistic mimicking of non-linguistic sounds, such as the barking of a dog *bow-wow*), *phonesthesia* (when the sound of the word reminds us of the action or object they describe as in *plunge, whisper, crack* or *frizzle*) and *phonesthemes* (an association of certain phonemes with certain meaning, in a rather random way, as *st-* for verbs indicating movement, as in *stomp, stampede, step, stride, stroll*)”.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of meaning below the level of morphemes, namely the idea of sound-related, phonemic meaning is mentioned by Riemer as well:

The question of what level of grammatical structure a meaning should be attributed to may often be problematic, and boundary cases, where meanings seem to straddle several different grammatical units, occur quite frequently. One such boundary case is *sound symbolism* (also known as *ideophony* or *onomatopoeia*). This is the existence of semi-systematic correspondences between certain sounds and certain meanings, usually within the domain of the individual morpheme, such as English *clash, clang, clatter*, etc. Such associations may sometimes have a clear imitative basis, as with English *click, thwack, meow*, etc. Sound symbolism is by no means limited to English, of course (Riemer 2010: 54–55).

## Morpheme meaning

Morphemes can have lexical and grammatical meanings. It is a commonplace that morphology refers to the structure of words. Words are the *carriers* of meaning, and to indicate or define meaning we use words. A close look at the internal structure of words will reveal that the different parts of words indicate different types of meaning. Morphemes may be lexical or grammatical and the

2 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 9.

3 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 10.

latter may be inflectional or derivational; each type of morpheme is used to convey a different type of meaning.

Let us begin with the grammatical meaning of morphemes: they are usually divided into *inflectional* morphemes (which do not change the grammatical category of the stem; e.g. the plural) and *derivational* morphemes (used to change the grammatical category of the stem; e.g. *-er* of *worker*).<sup>4</sup>

Inflectional meanings of morphemes

– Plurality: if we want to indicate that there is more than one element of the thing we are referring to, we attach a specific morpheme, the mark of plurality: *-s*. e.g. *boy-boys*. Of course, there are other ways to indicate plurality in English; we have umlaut (*man~men*), invariant forms (*sheep~sheep*), etc.

– Possession: we can indicate who the possessor of an element is by attaching another morpheme: *'s* (e.g. *Jim's hat*).

– Gender: in some English nouns – mainly those referring to animals or human professions – we can distinguish male from female by attaching a special morpheme, indicating that the sex is female: *-ess* in *waitress, actress*, etc. (Sometimes this is indicated by a totally different lexeme, such as *king – queen, bull – cow, boy – girl*, or it cannot be indicated at all by morpheme or change of word, as, for instance, with *doctor, engineer, eagle*).

– Size: Sometimes we can indicate the size of an object with a morpheme: this is the case of the diminutives. Even if the most obvious meaning of diminutives is size, their most frequent meaning is affection (e.g. *doggie*). Diminutives are not very frequent in English as compared to other languages, such as Romanian (*rochiță, grădiniță*, etc).

– Tense: If we add *-ed* to the stem of the verb, we indicate past-ness, the fact that the action was performed before the time of speaking (in the case of regular verbs, of course): *she worked a lot*.

– Person and number: if we add *-s* to the stem, we indicate that the action was performed by a third person (not the speaker or the hearer) in the singular number, and the tense is present: *she works hard*.

– Aspect: if we add *-ing*, we indicate that the action is still going on, *-ed* if the action has finished, etc: *she has worked; she is working*.

Derivational meanings of morphemes:

*-er* indicates the doer of the action, changing the grammatical category of a verb into a noun: *worker*. Other authors call the derivational grammatical meaning Functional (Part-of-Speech) Meaning, emphasizing the fact that with morphemes lexical meaning and the part-of-speech meaning tend to blend. “Functional meaning is the semantic component that serves primarily to refer the word to a certain part of speech” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 28).

<sup>4</sup> Most of the examples have been taken or adapted from *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/lincoing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>.



Thus, morphemes also have this so-called functional, grammatical meaning (or, in Ginzburg's terminology, part-of-speech meaning). For instance, the suffix *-er*, e.g. carries the meaning *the agent, the doer of the action*, while the suffix *-less* denotes *lack or absence of something*.

It should also be noted that the root-morphemes do not possess the part-of-speech meaning (cf. *manly, manliness*, to *man*); in derivational morphemes the lexical and the part-of-speech meaning may be so blended as to be almost inseparable. In the derivational morphemes *-er* and *-less* ... the lexical meaning is just as clearly perceived as their part-of-speech meaning. In some morphemes, however, for instance *-ment* or *-ous* (as in *movement* or *laborious*), it is the part-of-speech meaning that prevails, the lexical meaning is but vaguely felt (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 23).

This terminological inconsistency points to the same vagueness and difficulty in drawing the line between lexical and grammatical meanings of morphemes, which has made some scientists list morphemes with clear lexical meaning among the morphemes with grammatical meaning as, for instance:

- less* – without something, lack of something: *penniless*;
  - al* – relative to X: *derivational*;
  - ation* – the result of X-ing: *realization*;
  - ian* – pertaining to X: *Russian*.
- ology*.<sup>5</sup>

## Lexical meaning of morphemes

Just as with words, lexical meaning in morphemes may also be divided into denotational and connotational components. The connotational component of meaning may be found not only in root-morphemes but in affixational morphemes as well.

Endearing and diminutive suffixes, e.g. *-ette* (*kitchenette*), *-ie(y)* (*dearie, girlie*), *-ling* (*duckling*), clearly bear a heavy emotive charge. Comparing the derivational morphemes with the same denotational meaning we see that they sometimes differ in connotation only. The morphemes *-ly*, *-like*, *-ish* have the denotational meaning of similarity in the words *womanly, womanlike, womanish*, the connotational component, however, differs and ranges from the positive evaluation in *-ly* (*womanly*) to the derogatory in *-ish* (*womanish*) (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 23).

In addition to lexical meaning, morphemes may contain some specific types of meaning: differential and distributional.

5 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 11.

1. Differential meaning in morphemes is the semantic component which serves to distinguish one word from other words of similar morphemic structure. Differential and denotational meanings are not mutually exclusive. In words consisting of two or more morphemes, one of the constituent morphemes always has differential meaning. In such words as *bookshelf*, the morpheme *-shelf* serves to distinguish the word from other words containing the morpheme *book-*, such as *bookcase*, *book-counter*, etc.

2. Distributional meaning is the meaning of the pattern of the arrangement of the morphemes making up the word. Distributional meaning is to be found in all words composed of more than one morpheme. It may be the dominant semantic component in words containing morphemes deprived of denotational meaning. The word *singer* is composed of two morphemes *sing-* and *-er* both of which possess the denotational meaning, and namely *to make musical sounds* (*sing-*) and *the doer of the action* (*-er*) (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 26–27).

Lexical meaning displays associations outside the language. A lexeme is a minimal unit that can take part in referring or predicating. All the lexemes of a language constitute the *lexicon* of the language and all the lexemes that one knows make up one's personal lexicon. A lexeme may consist of just one meaningful part (*arm*, *chair*, *happy*, *guitar*) or of more than one meaningful part (*armchair*, *unhappy*, *guitarist*). Every language has a grammatical system and different languages have somewhat different grammatical systems. Grammatical meanings are expressed in various ways: by the arrangement of words (referring expression before the predicate, for instance), by grammatical affixes, and by grammatical words, or function words (Kreidler 1998: 58).

In morphology, the technical term for a minimal meaningful part is *morpheme*. Thus, not only words, but also smaller units have meaning, and this kind of meaning is usually considered grammatical meaning.

*Arm*, *chair*, *happy*, *guitar*, *lemon*, *shoe* and *horn* are all morphemes; none of them can be divided into something smaller that is meaningful. They are free morphemes because they occur by themselves. The elements *un-*, *-ist* and *-ade* in *unhappy*, *guitarist* and *lemonade*, respectively, are also morphemes; they are bound morphemes which are always attached to something else.

In general, we can note three 'sides' or aspects in the meaning of a lexicon. The denotation is the relation to phenomena outside of language, including imaginary phenomena; the connotation is the cluster of attitudes that the lexeme may evoke; the sense is its various potential relations to other lexemes with which it occurs in utterances (Kreidler 1998: 58).

## Word meaning

A dictionary entry tends to give the meaning of a word as a statement which defines its denotation: that is, its precise and narrowest direct and primary meaning. A detailed dictionary might also give some of the connotations of the word – its additional or secondary meanings (Mullany–Stockwell 2010: 65). Thus, the lexical meaning of words entails denotation and connotations as well.

## Grammatical or functional (part-of-speech) meaning of words

Words carry a certain amount of functional meaning, although this is not always very evident. As Ginzburg et alii put it: “All members of a major word-class share a distinguishing semantic component which, though very abstract, may be viewed as the lexical component of part-of-speech meaning. For example, the meaning of ‘thingness’ or substantiality may be found in all the nouns; e.g. *table*, *love*, *sugar*, though they possess different grammatical meanings of number, case, etc.” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 21).

We can express virtually anything with a word. For example, all the meanings that have been mentioned before, of grammatical morphemes, can be expressed lexically: number, for example, can be expressed with a numeral (*one*, *two*, etc.).

– *Nouns*: they express basically things, though not always; e.g. *redness* (a quality), *destruction* (an event), etc.

– *Verbs*: they are normally used to express actions or states.

These two types of words are the most basic of all; they are probably universal (there are languages that have no adjectives, articles or adverbs, but it is very unlikely that there are languages without nouns and verbs.)

– *Adjectives*: they are basically used to express qualities.

– *Adverbs*: they are used mostly to modify situations (events, actions, etc.) and properties.

Opposed to open class words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) that can express any type of meaning, scholars also refer to *closed* or *grammatical* word classes. “They seem to behave a bit like grammatical morphemes (or even inflectional morphemes); the range of meanings they can express is rather limited (compared to open-class words, anyway). While we can invent new meanings all the time in the ‘open’ classes, it would be much more difficult to add a new meaning to the ‘closed’ system.”<sup>6</sup>

Here are some closed, or grammatical words:

6 *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/linco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 13–14.

– *Prepositions*: they are used to indicate relations of place, time, and other things such as manner, causality, etc.

– *Determiners*: they are used to indicate reference. They help to clarify whether something has been mentioned before or not, or we are referring to all the instances of the entity or to a particular one, etc.

– *Conjunctions*: they are used to relate bigger chunks of meaning; we use them to indicate causality, coordination, etc., in general, how to relate what is being said to previous speech.<sup>7</sup>

## Lexical meaning of words

### Denotational and connotational meaning

Lexical meaning is the meaning associated with real-word entities or referents. The lexeme is the basic unit of semantic analysis. The lexeme is represented by a basic form and associated with a distinct lexical meaning comprised of a denotation and a sense. A lexical entry is the representation of one or more lexemes, taking into account its orthography, sound pattern, and list of meanings. Also, one can find grammatical information of two kinds, syntactic and morphological. For instance, the lexical entry of the lexeme *do* provides information on the fact that it is a transitive verb as well as the list of stems for the construction of its forms (*do, does, doing, did, done*).

Lexemes can be *word lexemes* (word-size, simple expressions) or *phrasal lexemes* (composite expressions). This latter category includes the idioms, which are expressions with no compositional meaning, i.e. the meaning of the whole cannot be deduced from the meaning of its components.

## Denotation

Denotational meaning is that component of the lexical meaning which makes communication possible. One of the functions of words is to denote things, concepts, and so on. “Users of a language cannot have any knowledge or thought of the objects or phenomena of the real world around them unless this knowledge is ultimately embodied in words which have essentially the same meaning for all speakers of that language” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 21). The denotational component is actually what makes communication possible.

<sup>7</sup> *Semántica Inglesa – Unit 1. What is semantics?* Downloaded from: <http://www.um.es/lingco-ing/jv/UNIT1.pdf>. 13–14.

## Connotation

Connotation is the second component of the lexical meaning, which is related to the emotive charge and the stylistic value of the word. According to Ginzburg et alii (1979), the connotational component comprises the stylistic reference and the emotive charge proper to the word as a linguistic unit in the given language system.

– Emotive charge

Words carry an amount of emotive charge and evaluation as part of the connotational meaning. When examining the synonyms *large*, *big*, and *tremendous* and *like*, *love*, and *worship* or words such as *girl*, *girlie*, *dear*, or *dearie*, we cannot fail to observe the difference in the emotive charge of the members of these sets. The emotive charge is one of the objective semantic features proper to words as linguistic units and forms part of the connotational component of meaning. It should not be confused with emotional implications that the words may acquire in speech.

The emotive implication of the word is to a great extent subjective as it greatly depends of the personal experience of the speaker, the mental imagery the word evokes in him. Words seemingly devoid of any emotional element may possess in the case of individual speakers strong emotive implications as may be illustrated, e.g. by the word *hospital*. What is thought and felt when the word *hospital* is used will be different in the case of an architect who built it, the invalid staying there after an operation, or the man living across the road (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 21).

– Stylistic reference

Stylistically words can be roughly subdivided into literary or neutral and colloquial layers.

– the greater part of the literary layer of Modern English vocabulary are words of general use, possessing no specific stylistic reference and known as neutral words;

– standard colloquial words and literary or bookish words.

This may be best illustrated by comparing words almost identical in their denotational meaning, e.g. *parent* – *father* – *dad*. In comparison with the word *father*, which is stylistically neutral, *dad* stands out as colloquial and *parent* is felt as bookish.

Literary (bookish) words are not stylistically homogeneous. Besides general-literary (bookish) words, e.g. *harmony*, *calamity*, *alacrity*, etc., we may single out various specific subgroups, namely: 1) terms or scientific words such as, e.g., *renaissance*, *genocide*, *teletype*, etc.; 2) poetic words and archaisms such as, e.g. *whilome* – ‘formerly’, *ought* – ‘anything’, *ere* – ‘before’, *albeit* – ‘although’, *fare* – ‘walk’, etc., *tarry* – ‘remain’, *nay* – ‘no’; 3) barbarisms and foreign words, such as, e.g. *bon mot* – ‘a clever or witty saying’, *apropos*, *faux pas*, *bouquet*, etc.

The colloquial words may be subdivided into:

- 1) Common colloquial words.
- 2) Slang, i.e. words which are often regarded as a violation of the norms of Standard English, e.g. *governor* for 'father', *missis* for 'wife', *a gag* for 'a joke', *dotty* for 'insane'.
- 3) Professionalisms, i.e. words used in narrow groups bound by the same occupation, such as, e.g., *lab* for 'laboratory', *hypo* for 'hypodermic syringe', *a buster* for 'a bomb', etc.
- 4) Jargonisms, i.e. words marked by their use within a particular social group and bearing a secret and cryptic character, e.g. *a sucker* – 'a person who is easily deceived', *a squiffer* – 'a concertina'.
- 5) Vulgarisms, i.e. coarse words that are not generally used in public, e.g. *bloody, hell, damn, shut up*, etc.
- 6) Dialectical words, e.g. *lass, kirk*, etc.
- 7) Colloquial coinages, e.g. *newspaperdom*, etc. (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 22).

Stylistic reference and emotive charge of words are closely connected and to a certain degree interdependent. Stylistically coloured words possess a considerable emotive charge. That can be proved by comparing stylistically labelled words with their neutral synonyms: the colloquial words *daddy, mummy* are undoubtedly more emotional than the neutral *father, mother*; the slang words *mum is* much more expressive than its neutral counterpart, *mother*.

## Sentence meaning

In order to understand the meaning of the sentence, we need to know two things:

1. whether it is in fact true or false given what we know about the world (its truth value);
2. the minimal conditions under which it will be true (its truth conditions). Anyone who knows a sentence's meaning knows the conditions under which it would be true; they know its truth conditions. If we investigate only the meaning of the words, then we would expect to get the two sentences: *The girl kisses everyone.* and *Everyone kisses the girl.* to mean exactly the same thing, since they are formed from exactly the same words. We also would expect to get the same meaning from the nonsensical string of words: \* *The everyone girl kisses.*

The order of words in a phrase helps determine the meaning of the phrase. However, notice that these two sentences with the different structures have the same meaning:

*The girl kisses everyone = Everyone is kissed by the girl.*<sup>8</sup>

The relationship between meaning and syntactic structure is often referred to as the *principle of compositionality*, which states that the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meaning of its words and by the syntactic structure in which they are combined. This principle is also called Frege's Principle after the mathematician and philosopher Gottlob Frege, who first stated it.

## Prosodic meaning

The way a sentence is said, using the prosody of the language, can radically alter the meaning. Any marked change in emphasis, for example, can lead to a sentence being interpreted in a fresh light.

e.g. a. *John has bought a red car* (not a bicycle).

b. *John has bought a red car* (not a green one).

c. *John has bought a red car* (not Michael).

The prosody informs us of what information in the sentence can be taken for granted (is 'given') and what is of special significance (is 'new').<sup>9</sup>

## Pragmatic meaning

The function performed by the sentence in a discourse needs to be considered. The meaning of the sentence *There's some chalk on the floor* seems plain enough; but in some situations it would be interpreted as a statement of fact (*Have you seen any chalk?*) and in others as a veiled command (as when a teacher might point out the chalk to a child in class: *Please, pick it up!*).<sup>10</sup>

## Contextual modulation of meaning

It is important to note that meaning may be influenced, to a considerable degree, by context. The meanings of words and other morphemes vary according to their *collocation*, the immediate linguistic context in which they occur.

This sort of variation is found throughout language. We can see a similar phenomenon in English, where the meanings of verbs seem to vary slightly depending on the noun which they govern. If I *cut my foot*, for example, I

8 Kordula De Kuthy, *Linguistics* 201, October 8, 2001. Downloaded from: <http://www.ling.ohio-state.edu/~kdk/201/autumn01/slides/semantics-4up.pdf>. 7.

9 Kordula De Kuthy, *Linguistics* 201, October 8, 2001. Downloaded from: <http://www.ling.ohio-state.edu/~kdk/201/autumn01/slides/semantics-4up.pdf>. 8.

10 Kordula De Kuthy, *Linguistics* 201, October 8, 2001. Downloaded from: <http://www.ling.ohio-state.edu/~kdk/201/autumn01/slides/semantics-4up.pdf>. 8.

am doing something that is rather different from what I am doing when I *cut the grass*, or when I *cut a cake*, *cut someone's hair*, *cut the wood*, *cut a diamond*, *cut a deck of cards*, *cut a disc* or *cut a notch*. The nature of the event, the means by which it is accomplished, its typical object, and the extent to which it is deliberate may all vary in these different uses. Despite this variation, we have the strong sense that essentially the 'same' meaning of *cut* is involved in all those cases (in other words, we do not usually think of this verb as polysemous; ... Cruse refers to this phenomenon as the *contextual modulation* of meaning. The degree of semantic 'distance' gets even greater if we consider more 'extended' meanings, like *cut a deal*, *cut corners*, *cut a paragraph* or *cut prices* (Riemer 2010: 57–58).

The meanings determined by *lexical contexts* are sometimes referred to as: lexically (or phraseologically) bound meanings, which implies that such meanings are to be found only in certain lexical contexts. Some linguists go so far as to assert that word meaning in general can be analysed through its collocability with other words. The meaning at the level of lexical contexts is sometimes described as meaning by collocation: e.g. the adjective *heavy*, in isolation, is understood as meaning 'of great weight, weighty' (*heavy load*, *heavy table*, etc.). When combined with the lexical group of words denoting natural phenomena such as *wind*, *storm*, *snow*, etc., it means 'striking, falling with force, abundant' as can be seen from the contexts, e.g. *heavy rain*, *wind*, *snow*, *storm*, etc. In combination with the words *industry*, *arms*, *artillery*, and the like, *heavy* has the meaning 'the larger kind of something' as in *heavy industry*, *heavy artillery*, etc. The verb *take* in isolation has primarily the meaning 'lay hold of with the hands, grasp, seize', etc. When combined with the lexical group of words denoting some means of transportation (e.g. *to take the tram*, *the bus*, *the train*, etc.), it acquires the meaning synonymous with the meaning of the verb *go* (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 52).

In *grammatical contexts*, it is the grammatical (mainly the syntactic) structure of the context that serves to determine various individual meanings of a polysemantic word. Such meanings are sometimes described as grammatically (or structurally) bound meanings. Examples in this respect would be:

the verb *make*, e.g. 'to force, to induce' [*sic*] (induce), is found only in the grammatical context possessing the structure to make somebody do something or in other terms this particular meaning occurs only if the verb *make* is followed by a noun and the infinitive of some other verb (*to make somebody laugh*, *go*, *work*, etc.). Another meaning of this verb 'to become', 'to turn out to be' is observed in the contexts of a different structure, i.e. *make* followed by an adjective and a noun (*to make a good wife*, *a good teacher*, etc.) (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 52).



The extra-linguistic context, or *situational context* may determine the meaning of the word. “It is of interest to note that not only the denotational but also the connotational component of meaning may be affected by the context: *to give somebody a ring*” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 52).

## Taxonomies of meaning

We will present three taxonomies, namely Finegan’s taxonomy, Leech’s taxonomy, and Vizental’s taxonomy.

### Finegan’s taxonomy of meaning typology

Finegan (2004: 181–182) distinguishes three types of meaning, i.e. *linguistic*, *social*, and *affective meaning*.

Linguistic meaning encompasses both sense and reference. One way of defining meaning is to say that the meaning of a word or sentence is the actual person, object, abstract notion, event, or state to which the word or sentence makes reference. Referential meaning may be the easiest kind to recognize, but it is not sufficient to explain how some expressions mean what they mean. For one thing, not all expressions have referents. Social meaning is what we rely on when we identify certain social characteristics of speakers and situations from the character of the language used. Affective meaning is the emotional connotation that is attached to words and utterances.<sup>11</sup>

It is easy to notice that Finnegan’s linguistic meaning is, in fact, cognitive meaning or denotation.

### Leech’s taxonomy of meaning typology

G. Leech distinguished seven main types of meaning (Leech 1990: 9).<sup>12</sup>

a. *Logical/conceptual meaning*, also called *denotative* or *cognitive meaning*, is considered to be the central factor in linguistic communication. The principles of *contrastiveness* and *constituent structure* – paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes of linguistic structure – manifest at this level, i.e. the conceptual meaning can be studied in terms of *contrastive features*. To a large extent, the notion of reference overlaps with conceptual meaning, which tends to be stable over time.

11 Susana Widyastuti, *Componential analysis of meaning: theory and applications*. Downloaded from: [staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf](http://staff.uny.ac.id/sites/.../compential%20analysis%20of%20meaning.pdf). 1–2.

12 Examples and explanations also adapted from: [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

b. *Connotative meaning* is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to. Connotations vary from age to age, from society to society: e.g. *woman* [*capable of speech*] [*experienced in cookery*], [*frail*] [*prone to tears*], [*non-trouser-wearing*].

Connotative meanings are relatively *unstable* as they vary according to cultural, historical period, experience of the individual. "Connotative meaning is *indeterminate* and *open-ended*, that is any characteristic of the referent, identified subjectively or objectively, may contribute to the connotative meaning."<sup>13</sup>

c. *Social meaning* can be understood only by considering the pragmatic dimension of meaning. Social meaning is the kind of meaning which a piece of language conveys about the social circumstances of its use and the social roles and functions of language users. In part, we *decode* the social meaning of a text through our recognition of different dimensions and levels of style.<sup>14</sup>

d. *Affective meaning* is the grammaticalization of the way language reflects the personal feelings of the speaker, his/her attitude towards his/her interlocutor or towards the topic of discussion.

e. *Reflected meaning* arises in cases of multiple conceptual meaning, when one sense of a word forms part of our response to another sense.

On hearing, in a church service, the synonymous expressions *the Comforter* and *the Holy Ghost*, one may react according to the everyday non-religious meanings of *comfort* and *ghost*. One sense of a word 'rubs off' on another sense when it has a dominant suggestive power through frequency and familiarity. The case when reflected meaning intrudes through the sheer strength of emotive suggestion is illustrated by words which have a taboo meaning; this taboo contamination accounted in the past for the dying out of the non-taboo sense; Bloomfield explains in this way the replacement of *cock* by *rooster*.<sup>15</sup>

f. *Collocative meaning* consists of the associations a word acquires on account of the meanings of words which tend to occur in its environment/collocate with it: e.g. *pretty girl/boy/flower/colour; handsome boy/man/car/vessel/overcoat/typewriter*.

g. *Thematic meaning* means what is communicated by the way in which a speaker/writer organizes the message in terms of ordering, focus, or emphasis. Emphasis can be illustrated by word order: e.g. *Laura donated the first prize./The first prize was donated by Laura*; by grammatical constructions: e.g. *There's a man waiting in the hall./It's Dutch cheese that I like best*; by lexical means: e.g. *The shop belongs to him/He owns the shop*; by intonation e.g. *He wants an electric razor*.<sup>16</sup>

13 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

14 *cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc*

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**Table 3.** Leech's meaning categories may be summed up as follows:<sup>17</sup>

1. Conceptual Meaning		Logical, cognitive, or denotative content
Associative meaning	2. Connotative Meaning	What is communicated by virtue of what language refers to
	3. Social Meaning	What is communicated of the social circumstances of language use
	4. Affective Meaning	What is communicated of the feelings and attitudes of the speaker/writer
	5. Reflected Meaning	What is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression
	6. Collocative Meaning	What is communicated through association with words tending to occur in the environment of another word
7. Thematic Meaning	7. Thematic Meaning	What is communicated by the way in which the message is organized in terms of order and emphasis

### Vizental's taxonomy of meaning typology

Meaning, in a wider sense, could be defined as everything that is communicated through language. In a narrower interpretation, meaning is limited to "the study of the conceptual system of the language" (Vizental 2006: 21). Communication means much more than simple items that obey dictionary rules; hence we can refer to several types of meaning besides the lexical, dictionary-based one. Vizental proposes the following levels, or types of meaning:

1. *conceptual/logical meaning*, i.e. the type of meaning that is strictly related to the conceptual system of the language and which is basic for the speaker's semantic competence;
2. several types of *associative meanings* (as Leech calls them), i.e. the types of meaning which lexical items carry beyond the actual semantic charge of lexical items; and

3. *pragmatic meaning*, i.e. the meaning which results from the organization of the text and from language use (Vizental 2006: 21–22).

## Conceptual meaning

There are two types of conceptual meaning, i.e. conceptual meaning proper and prototypical meaning.

### Conceptual meaning proper

Conceptual meaning proper is also called *logical* or *cognitive meaning*, denotation or sense. It is the meaning listed in dictionaries. Conceptual meaning reflects the referent, i.e. the object or phenomenon the term refers to. Even if languages differ widely, it is generally accepted that they all share, roughly speaking, the same conceptual framework (and maybe the same grammar). This means that most languages have words for the most basic items, activities, phenomena (*mother, family, to be, to have, good, beautiful, eat* must exist in any language). This theory of *semantic universals* can explain the process of translation. Yet, one has to be careful with these linguistic universals as they can be highly culture-dependent (for instance, Eskimos have a large number of terms related to *snow*).

Furthermore, classifications of the world and of society are often culturally determined and terminologies differ significantly from one language or culture to another ... in practice, however, the same semantic categories are seen to operate in different languages, so that categories of meaning can be regarded as language-neutral, i.e. as belonging to the common human faculty of language, rather than to the ability to speak a certain language (Vizental 2006: 24).

The notion of *conceptual analysis* must be mentioned, which follows Saussure's idea that semiotic systems have two ways of making meaning: syntagmatic combination and paradigmatic choice, to which conceptual analysis adds one more dimension: the dimension of language levels (spelling, pronunciation, structure, and meaning). According to conceptual analysis, the meaning of an item can be reduced, broken down to its minimal components or features of meaning. Expressing such minimal features of meaning in terms of  $[\pm]$  is, in fact, characterizing the referent *contrastively*, i.e. positively (by the features it possesses) or negatively (by features it does not possess). For instance, the pairs *father/mother, brother/sister* are distinguished by the opposition  $[+MALE]/[-MALE]$ . *Boy* and *man* are distinguished by the opposition  $[\pm ADULT]$ , while *desk* and *boy* are distinguished by the opposition  $[\pm ANIMATE]$ , while *book* and *knowledge* are distinguished by  $[\pm CONCRETE]$ .

Compositional analysis means the description of conceptual meanings in terms of *combinations of contrastive features*. The componential definition of the term *man* is: [+HUMAN] [+ADULT] [+MALE], whereas in the case of *woman* we will have: [+HUMAN] [+ADULT] [-MALE]. Componential analysis watches over the combinatory power of semantic features and may explain the way anomalies occur due to the violations of selection restrictions. Thus, the combination *male man* is anomalous, is a pleonastic expression because the componential definition of *man* involves the feature [+MALE], which makes the usage of *male* next to *man* redundant. The same applies for *dead corpse* or to *enter inside* (see the chapter on componential analysis).

## Prototypical meaning

A person's mental dictionary is the sum of words and terms s/he knows and uses. The richer his/her life experience, the richer his mental dictionary becomes. Yet, there is a big "gap between one's mental dictionary (i.e. his knowledge of the conceptual system of the language) and his mental encyclopedia (i.e. his general capacity for assimilating, storing and implementing world experience)" (Vizental 206: 28). Prototypical meaning is linked to people's capacity to rely on one's background knowledge and inferring new meanings of terms one does not know by relying on previous experience. In interpreting and organizing our experience, we usually use mental categories, not individual examples. Within our mental encyclopaedia, we recognize individual members of a category by matching them with a prototype, i.e. a mental model of typical example of that category. Yet, this may lead to mistakes like calling a *whale* a *fish* (only because it looks like a fish, yet it is a mammal).

Brown and Yule suggest that we organize our background knowledge into easily recognizable units, *frames* incorporating conventional aspects of a certain situation (when talking about *school*, we visualize a classroom with desks, blackboard, etc.). Another way of organizing this knowledge is into *scripts* (*shopping* usually means a chain of events).

A person's background knowledge largely depends on his *socio-cultural schemata*, i.e. the general usage of a term depends on society's views concerning the real-world situation behind them. For example, in today's Western society, a young female person aged thirteen is generally called a *girl*; in centuries passed, or in some primitive civilizations even today (e.g. Gypsy tribes, tribes in Africa), the term *woman* would be the appropriate label. The perception of the term may also be determined geographically: to most European children, the word *pet* will probably recall a dog or a cat; to African children, it is likely to bring the memory of a monkey or a parrot (Vizental 2006: 30).

Having said these, let us take a look at the different types of associative meanings.

## Associative meanings

Successful linguistic communication does not rely only on the dictionary-based word-recalling skills of the speakers, but it also relies heavily on their world and background knowledge, life experience. The words' communicative content is only partially covered by their conceptual meaning. This conceptual meaning is usually shared by the members of the community, it is generally stable, but it fails to comprise the additional meanings, not listed in dictionaries. These additional meanings are less stable, and they may vary across contexts, speakers, societies, and ages. Some linguists claim that conceptual meaning is the only type of meaning that can be subject to semantic investigations, as all the other types of meanings depend on pragmatic factors. Others say that additional meanings cannot be ignored by semanticists. Relying on Leech, Vizental proposes five types of additional, or associative meanings, i.e. *social meaning*, *connotative meaning*, *affective meaning*, *reflected meaning*, and *collocative meaning*.

## Social meaning

Social meaning is related to what items of language convey about the social circumstances of language use. Thus, pronunciation can tell a lot of things about the geographic and social background of language users: not only can we differentiate Brits from Americans, but we can also distinguish social origin, group membership (educated vs non-educated speakers, upper-class vs working-class speakers). Vocabulary options and stylistic choices can reveal social roles, situations of use, relationship between speakers, etc.

Deixis (pointing, indicating) illustrates the way language grammaticalizes features of the context of utterances. In other words, deixis reveals how social meaning of the context is encoded and carried by the language. With indexicals, conceptual meaning is also very important, and the dictionary meaning of terms like *here/there*, *I*, *yesterday* is understood by all members of a linguistic community. Social deixis and person deixis are the two types of deictic elements that carry social meaning. Speakers' deictic choices tell us who they are in point of social position, social background, and social circumstances. Person deixis encodes the roles of participants through the pronoun system and predicate agreement.

Conceptually, the 1<sup>st</sup> person category is the grammaticalization of the speaker's reference to himself, 2<sup>nd</sup> person encodes the speaker's reference to one/more addressees, while 3<sup>rd</sup> person is the encoding of reference to persons/

entities which are not speakers or addressees of the utterance. Thus, person deixis operates on this three-part division (*I/you/he, she, it*), imposing the deictic categories of *speaker, addressee, and others*. An example of social contract encoded, grammaticalized within person deixis is the distinction between forms used for a familiar vs a non-familiar addressee: *tu* vs *vous* in French, *du* vs *Sie* in German, *te* vs *Ön* in Hungarian, *tu* vs *Dumneavoastră* in Romanian.

Another way of encoding social deixis is through verbal inflections. In French, for instance, verbs take different endings for polite second person singular and plural forms.

Social deixis encodes relative status and roles of participants through the categories of pronouns, vocatives, titles, and addresses. Social deixis is the encoding of social distinctions relative to participant roles, aspects of social relationship between speaker and addressee, speaker and/or referent. Among the social deictic expressions we mention the honorifics, the choices between different pronouns, summonses, forms or vocatives, titles of address, etc.

A sentence like *We were there* states that the speaker was there, but it does not specify whether the addressee was there or not. Pragmatically, the addressee has no doubts about his/her inclusion/exclusion from the interlocutor's reference.

The categories of pronouns go along with corresponding morphological agreement. Verbal inflections can encode person, number, and degree of politeness. Social status is encoded differently in different languages: while in English there is only one second person pronoun, in French, there are two (*tu, vous*), in Romanian, there are three (*tu/Dumneavoastră/dumneata*). The English language has developed other ways of encoding social status: choice of vocabulary, formality of style, honorifics (*Sir/Madam*), terms of address, titles, etc.

Sometimes, titles of address and honorifics impose non-conventional rules of morphological agreement: *Your Lordship knows* (and not know) *this*. The honorific *Mister* sounds polite only if it is followed by a name (*Mister X*). In isolation, *Mister* sounds rude and insulting. Whenever the speaker does not know the name of the addressee, he should avoid using *Mister* and rely on *Sir*.

Vocative terms also carry social meaning. Among vocative terms, we mention noun phrases set apart from the rest of the sentence (*Hey you!, Listen*), which are familiar in style; parenthetical addressees are widely accepted (*So, my friend, this is the story*); greeting or parting phrases like *How do you do* (formal), *Good afternoon* (neutral), *Hello* (informal), or *Hi* (familiar). Formal styles require longer and more complex sentences.

Social meaning and expressive meaning often mingle and are interdependent. Social meaning is the use of language that establishes and maintains social relations. This is directly linked to the phatic function of language, i.e. when the message is focused on establishing and keeping contact with the addressee.



## Connotative meaning

Connotative meaning is the most important subtype of associative meaning, conveyed “over and above the conceptual content of the word” (Vizental 2006: 36). Denotation is stable, invariable; connotation, on the other hand, is unstable, variable according to person, social group, age, etc. Semantically, the conceptual meaning of words is neutral and stable, but there is a special semantic load words carry, the so-called *connotations*, that are varied and open-ended. Theoretically, conceptual analysis claims that semantic features are invariable. Yet, the truth is that the same extra-linguistic item is interpreted differently by people. Such variations can be personal, social, or historical.

Adriana Vizental offers the example of the term *baby*, which can be described as [+HUMAN] [-ADULT] [±MALE], which still causes positive feelings to a mother, but negative ones to an annoyed neighbour, fed up with the incessant crying of a baby. In point of denotation, monosemantic words have one denotation (one entry in the dictionary), while polysemantic words have several. The number of denotative meanings is limited, whereas the number of connotative meanings is theoretically unlimited.

Connotations vary from culture to culture. This system of connotations that are usually known by and familiar to the members of a certain culture may be the reason for which connotations hidden in advertisements, when translated in an artificial manner, do not work in the target language.

In ‘The Discourse of Advertising’ (1992: 104), Guy Cook makes a detailed analysis of brand names, choosing perfumes and cars as prototypical products, *expressions of self and sexuality: ... a woman is her perfume ... a man is his car*.

Perfumes are indescribable in words – a smell has no denotation. Therefore, since there is no component to be denoted, there are almost no restrictions in terms of naming. That is why, perfume names concentrate on connotation.

To prove the primacy of connotation in the naming of perfumes, Cook gives the following example: ‘Opium’ (the name of a perfume) denotes a well-known narcotic. ‘Morphine’ (a narcotic refined from opium), and ‘heroin’ (a narcotic refined from morphine) are semantically related to the word ‘opium’ (they are its co-hyponyms). Yet, their connotations make it highly unlikely that a perfume should be named either ‘morphine’ or ‘heroin’: while ‘opium’ connotes ‘the nineteenth century, the Orient, Romantic poetry, and bohemian illegality (i.e. positive connotations), ‘morphine’ recalls ‘painful disease, hospitals and accidents’, and ‘heroin’ speaks of ‘organized crime, premature death, HIV infection, unwilling prostitution, urban poverty.

Even seemingly unpleasant names have their curious attractiveness: a women’s perfume named ‘Tramp’ (i.e. woman who sleeps around) does sell



– and so does the men's perfume called 'Egoiste'. Obviously, advertisers know of the fascination evil and the forbidden exert upon people.

With cars, the situation is slightly different: a car has a physical materiality which cannot be ignored, so that the brand name must share some denotation with its referent. Thus, the car named *Jaguar* is streamlined and accelerates fast; just like the animal whose name it carries. But the name also recalls other connotations of the word: rarity, beauty, superiority, aggression, violence, sexuality, etc. (Vizental 2007: 37–38).

## Affective meaning

Through affective meaning, words are able to express the speakers' emotions, feelings, and attitudes towards things. Among the words that carry an important amount of affective meaning are the interjections (which often do not even have a denotative meaning at all), such as *Wow!*, *Yuck!*, adjectives used as interjections, such as *Great!*, *Cool!*, *Awful!* The list may be continued with the nouns, noun phrases, adjectives, or verbs that convey feelings like *darling*, *love*, *hate*, *horrible*, *disgusting*, etc. The affective meaning of such constructs can be delivered or carried by their connotations. The connotative meaning of words like *honey* or *jewel* is obviously positive, while terms like *louse* or *shark* is negative. The affective load need not even be explained in the case of sentences like: *Where have you been, honey?* or *He is a shark*.

Some linguists call the words with strong negative connotation *snarl words*, while the words with strong positive connotation *purr words* (Hayakawa<sup>18</sup> apud Vizental 2006: 38).

Thus, with snarl words, conceptual meaning becomes irrelevant because whoever is using them is simply capitalizing on their unfavourable connotations in order to give forceful expression to his own hostility. In the language of the press, terms like *communist* or *fascist*, *sharks* or *vultures* are often used to snarl. The category of political purr words can be illustrated with terms like *democracy*, *freedom* or *human rights*.

Advertising has its own purr words and snarl words. *New*, *soft*, *free*, *only*, *high-tech*, *innovative* are used to purr, while *old* and *other* (e.g. your old detergent/your old products) have the function of snarling at the competitors inferior products (Vizental 2006: 39).

Purr words (words with positive connotations) and snarl words (words with negative connotations) convey the person's feelings and attitudes.

Affective meaning can also be delivered by paralinguistic features like tone of voice, intonation, facial expression, which can also alter the message of the

18 Hayakawa, *Language in thought and action*, quoted by Leech, 1990, 44.

words themselves. A seemingly polite request will sound harsh if it is uttered while the speaker is making faces or a seemingly impolite order sounds mild when uttered with a friendly tone.

Besides its lexical meaning, there are a lot of pragmatic factors that contribute to meaning. Thus, a sentence like *You are really smart*, when uttered with irony, has the exact opposite meaning to what the lexical meaning of the individual words convey. Sentences like *Good Lord!*, *Good heavens!*, etc. have an obvious expressive meaning of surprise. Exclamation is one of the means through which feelings, attitudes, and beliefs can be expressed.

## Collocative meaning

Collocative meaning refers to the meaning delivered by those sequences of items that usually co-occur, such as *to pay a visit*, *to miss/catch the bus*, *to book a ticket*, etc. Sometimes even the choice of a synonym is determined by such collocation: for instance, although *merry* and *happy* are synonyms, it would sound awkward to greet someone with *merry new year* or *happy Christmas*. Adjectives have a high degree of co-occurrence regulations. *Heavy* collocates with terms of consumption (*heavy smoker*) or with rain (*heavy rain*), but not with *eater*, *learner*, etc. *Pretty*, *beautiful*, *handsome*, and *good-looking* are synonyms, but *pretty* is restricted to young females or small objects, *beautiful* to mature women and valuable items, *handsome* to male persons. Changing the partner in these collocations would mean to change the meaning. Collocation restricts language usage and meanings, ultimately leading to idioms and idiomatic phrase.

“While collocations focus on the lexical co-occurrences, as conventionally accepted by the system of the language, and the reciprocal effect of one item upon the other, reflected meaning takes the analysis further, to investigate the effect of the actual realities that stand behind the term upon its semantic load” (Vizental 2006: 39).

## Reflected meaning

Reflected meaning is revealed especially in the case of words with several meanings and which have a positive and a negative associative meaning as well. In these cases, the negative meaning or connotation affects and contaminates the general or positive meaning (ghost). Taboo words fall into the same category: words related to the body's physiology and people's sexual activities are perceived as shameful by people. That is why, they are replaced with roundabouts or euphemistic expressions, which can quickly become contaminated as well (it is the case of the otherwise perfectly respectable *intercourse*, *gay*, *cock*, etc.

Taboo words are, perhaps, the best example of how lexical items fall out of usage on account of the negative associations they recall. For example, words connected with the body's excremental functions, or with the physiology of sex become polluted by the reality behind the word. Since they are felt to be shameful, people avoid using them in everyday conversation and replace them with roundabout (i.e. euphemistic) expressions. However, the new expressions get contaminated quite rapidly, too, because what is 'shameful' is not the linguistic expression, but the reality it covers (Vizental 2007: 40).

## Pragmatic meaning

There are two types of pragmatic meaning: thematic meaning and strategic meaning. As we have seen so far, words carry a conceptual meaning shared by all members of a linguistic community, but they also carry other types of meanings, which are less stable, which are fuzzy and personal, the so-called associative meanings. Sending and receiving a linguistic message, the encoding and the decoding process largely depend on the participants' psychological and linguistic abilities. "That is why, linguists consider that meaning – or rather, making meaning – is a dynamic process that involves a negotiation, on a case-to-case basis, between the sender and the receiver of the message, according to the real-world setting (e.g. physical and social) in which the exchange takes place" (Vizental 2006: 43). Meaning is made of the meaning potential of its components, but also of elements brought in by the pragmatic factors that influence communication.

Semantics studies the role of the linguistic environment. Speakers' linguistic and semantic competence helps them identify all possible meanings of utterances, and this phase is followed by the identification of the contextual meaning. Context, in this sense, has two levels: linguistic context and non-linguistic context (real-world context). The components of the non-linguistic context are:

- Sender (and his/her social background, psychological features, educational level, intentions, etc.);
- Receiver (and his social role and position, capacity and willingness to interpret and decode, etc.);
- Social constraints of the interaction (interlocutors' status, place and environment, activity type, time of interaction) (Vizental 2006: 44).

Pragmatic factors can have an effect on the production and the reception of a linguistic message. Semantics does not take into consideration the role of participants and the role of the physical context.

## Thematic meaning

Thematic meaning is the grammatical organization of the message by the speaker. When the speaker places an item in an initial position in the sentence, this means that s/he wishes to emphasize that item, highlighting it as the most important piece of information of the sentence. The same applies to the choice between active or passive voice (stress on the doer of the action in the case of active voice) or foregrounding a part of the sentence through stress or intonation. However, one must know that this can be explained by the fact that most sentences in English have two parts: a *theme* (or *topic*) and a *rheme*. The *theme* is the information which is known and the *rheme* is new information to be communicated. In English, the *theme* usually comes at the beginning of the sentence and the *rheme* at the end.

e.g. *The M1 goes from Budapest to Austria.* (*M1*= theme, i.e. known information, *from Budapest to Austria*= rheme, i.e. new information)

*The highway which leads from Budapest to Austria is called M1.* (*The highway which leads from Budapest to Austria*=theme, i.e. known information, *M1*= rheme, i.e. new information)

Thus, English is an end-focus language. This end-focus principle means that the most important or new pieces of information are placed at the end of the sentence, whereas given or known information is put at the beginning: e.g. *Scientists believe that climate changes are caused by greenhouse effect* (the new information is placed at the end of the sentence, receiving more prominence).

## Strategic meaning

Efficient communicators master the art of appropriate, functional, and strategic use of language. An appropriate language use means to adapt the linguistic message to the social setting in which the interaction takes place. Knowing our own social status relative to the conversational partner and encoding this status in the message involves the choice of the right vocabulary, of the appropriate grammatical and stylistic structures. This means that our pragmatic knowledge is grammaticalized in the language. Strategic meaning implies using the language appropriately, functionally, and strategically.

There are other constraints that influence our linguistic behaviour; among these, we mention the situational context: there are places and contexts where more elevated language is required and some others which leave room for more familiar linguistic acts. It is also true that the way language is used by people also influences events: adopting a formal tonality imposes distant social relationship, while a joke can relieve a tense conversational setting.

The functional use of language involves the five basic functions that language has:

- A neutral informational function: people use the language to convey information;

- A directive function: people use the language to influence other people's behaviour and attitudes;

- A phatic function: people use the language to keep communication lines and social relationships open;

- An expressive function: people use the language to express feelings and attitudes;

- An aesthetic function: people use the language to produce beauty, to please and to be interesting (Vizental 2006: 47).

The informational function is linked to the conceptual meaning of terms, the expressive and aesthetic functions are connected with connotative and affective meaning, and the directive and phatic functions are dependent on social meaning.

Speech acts and indirectness carry pragmatic meaning, by which the speaker expresses more or even something else than is transmitted through the literal meaning of words. Speech acts carry more or different meaning than the semantic load of the words. Thus, we can speak about a lexical level of meaning, a contextual level of meaning, and the force of the utterance. A great deal of the speaker's meaning is conveyed indirectly. Indirectness is an outstanding bearer of pragmatic meaning, and people prefer indirectness for a number of reasons (to be more interesting, more polite, etc.). Because of the massive amount of indirectness, some indirect constructs have been conventionalized: for instance, *How do you do*. Translators have to be very careful with such constructs as they do not intend to inquire about the interlocutor's well-being, but they are rather a form of greeting.

Another aspect that has to be considered refers to the cultural differences: straightforward indirectness in American English, but Asian cultures recommend and use more elaborate strategies of indirectness and politeness. Many speech acts are culture-specific.

This is particularly so in the case of institutionalized speech acts, which typically use standardized and stereotyped formulae and are performed in public ceremonies. A good example is provided by the speech act of divorcing. In some Muslim cultures, under the appropriate circumstances, the uttering of a sentence .... three times consecutively by a husband to his wife will *ipso facto* constitute a divorce. By contrast, in Western cultures, no one (no matter what his or her religion is) can felicitously use 'I hereby divorce you.' to obtain a divorce.... Secondly, given a particular situation, pertinent speech acts are carried out differently in different cultures. For instance, in some East Asian and Western cultures, if one steps on another

person's toes, one normally performs the speech act of apologizing. But apparently this is not the case among the Akans, a West African culture.... Another example: while in English, thanks and compliments are usually offered to the hosts when leaving a dinner party, in Japanese society, apologies such as *o-jama itashimashita* 'I have intruded on you' are more likely to be offered by the guests. A similar speech act of apologizing is performed in Japanese upon receiving a present, when a Japanese speaker is likely to say something like *sumimasen* – the most common Japanese 'apology' formula – or one of its variants. Conversely (as pointed out by many authors), apologies can be used in a much broader range of speech situations in Japanese than in English.... Thirdly, in different cultures/languages, the same speech act may meet with different typical responses. For example, a compliment normally generates acceptance/thanking in English, but self-denigration in Chinese, Japanese, or even Polish.... Fourthly, the same speech act may differ in its directness/indirectness in different cultures (Mey 2009: 1006–1007).

British philosopher J. L. Austin (1911–1960) was the first to approach the issue of speech acts, i.e. the large variety of functions performed by utterances as part of interpersonal communication. His revolutionary idea was that utterances often do not (simply) convey information, but are rather equivalent to actions. In his *How to do things with words*, Austin noted that some ordinary language declarative sentences are not apparently used with any intention of making true or false statements. Such sentences are not used just to say things (i.e. describe a certain state of affairs), but rather to actively do things. Utterances like: *I bet you a dollar it will rain tonight; I hereby name this ship Queen Mary; I apologize; I object; I sentence you to ten years of hard labour; I give my word; I warn you that trespassers will be prosecuted; I promise to do that* automatically induce some changes in the psychological or social reality: somebody is apologized only after, and not before the utterance – such as *I apologize* – is performed; the ship is referred to by the name *Queen Mary* only after the act of naming is completed. An illocutionary act refers to the semantic 'illocutionary force' of the utterance, thus to its real, intended meaning. This is also known as the illocutionary force of an utterance.

Due to their illocutionary force, speech acts carry more meaning than the semantic load of the terms that make up the utterance. This means that "in reality, utterances convey meaning on three levels: a lexical/conceptual meaning, a contextual meaning, and the force of the utterance" (Vizental 2006: 49).

The level of lexical meaning implies knowing the dictionary meaning of words, recognizing the potential meaning and identifying polysemy or homonymy and acknowledging the grammatical relationships among words. The level of contextual meaning is related to working out the lexical and syntactic ambiguities and decoding the correct meaning by considering the elements of the given context.

The strategic use of the language refers to the use of indirectness in order to convey pragmatic meaning. There is a massive amount of indirectness in people's linguistic behaviour, and this applies especially to native speakers. Among the reasons of preferring indirect speech acts, we must mention the desire to be more interesting, the desire to achieve some goals, and the desire to be polite. A lot of indirect speech acts have become linguistic conventions, such as *How do you do?*, *Can you/would you?* Another conventionalized item of language is figurative speech.

In non-conventionalized indirectness, people introduce a lot of false starts, hedges, repetitions, reformulations. Such expressions like *Well...*, *You know...*, *I mean...* are called *repair strategies*.

Another type of indirectness is Grice's conversational implicature, through which Grice tried to explain how the speaker can manipulate language intentionally and specifically in order to convey more meaning than the semantic meaning of the words.

According to his Cooperative Principle, interlocutors contribute to the communicative exchange truly (i.e. they say what they think is true), clearly (i.e. they express their thoughts as transparently as possible), economically (they do not say more than required), and relevantly (they provide the information they know/think the listener needs).

Whenever these requirements are not observed (i.e. the maxims of co-operation are obviously flouted), the speaker probably wants to convey more information than is carried by his words ... implicature functions, on sentence level, the way connotation functions at word level (Vizental 2006: 51).

The assumption of co-operation holds even when people say obvious lies, which means that the real, intended meaning of their sentence is completely different if not the exact opposite. Grice's principle stands at the basis of figurative speech, such as metaphors, hyperboles, etc.

E.g. *John is a vulture* relies on a conceptual non-truth, because John = [+HUMAN] [+ADULT] [+MALE], while vulture = [-HUMAN] [±ADULT] [±MALE].

Another issue that should be dealt with when talking about pragmatic meaning is the *linguistic strategy of politeness*. Leech claims that tact is an important ingredient of communication in English. Brown and Levinson developed their own politeness theory, based on the concept of *face*. Face is the individual's sense of self-esteem. "According to these theories, people indulge in extremely complicated linguistic strategies so as to avoid intruding or hurting other people's feelings, or aiming to protect their own face. In cases when requesting is painful and a refusal would be mortifying, indirectness is the best solution" (Vizental 2006: 53). Directness and indirectness are dosed by speakers in accordance with the social circumstances of the exchange. The greater the social distance, the less direct and the more indirect the utterance becomes.

Indirectness implies formality of style, choosing the proper vocabulary and grammar. In formal language, direct imperatives are replaced with perfective constructions, modals expressing advice and the sentences are longer and more complex.

On the other hand, there is a long list of safe topics or small-talk items that can be introduced within the conversation in order to keep politeness and social relations in good repair. Among these: talking about the weather, telling jokes.





## CHANGES OF MEANING

Under the influence of social and technological changes that occur at high speed, languages are forced to cover an overwhelming amount of new referents with newly created words. To meet the needs of this fast-changing social reality, every language implements some modalities of word creation: either by borrowing from other languages or by creating, coining them, or by changing the meaning of already existing items. Thus, the number of neologisms constantly grows and languages change gradually in accordance with their inner laws and under the influence of other languages. The most important types of lexical innovation are the following:

- Borrowing words, the so-called loanwords;
- Word formation, creating brand new words from words or word particles that already exist in a language;
- Change of meaning, deriving new meanings from already existing items.

### a. Borrowing

English and Romanian belong to the family of Indo-European languages, English belongs to the Germanic branch, Romanian belongs to the Romance languages, while Hungarian belongs to the Finno-Ugric branch of Uralic languages.

The words that are borrowed from other languages are called loanwords. We shall not insist on the loanwords English has borrowed from different languages over the centuries. Yet, we mention that the English lexicon is made up of five main elements: Anglo-Saxon (also called Old English, the most important part), French, Latin, Greek, and Scandinavian. Out of these fundamental strata, English has borrowed from Italian (*concert*, *soprano*), Spanish (*chocolate*, *tobacco*), German (*iceberg*), Dutch (*aloof*, *brandy*, *cruise*, *landscape*), and other languages (Levițchi 1970: 41–42). Today's American English is the main source of loan words for every language, and this is mainly due to the magnitude and the amount of the American media, American popular culture, and the international economic and social position of the USA.

## b. Word formation

Word formation is the formation of new lexemes from already existing bases. It represents one of the most important means of enriching vocabulary. The most common techniques of word formation are the following: derivation/affixation, conversion, composition, contraction, word coinage, etc.

### Derivation/affixation

Derivation, also called *affixation*, is the means of word creation by adding suffixes to already existing lexemes. Affixes are of two main types: prefixes and suffixes. Prefixes precede the root word, while suffixes are placed after the root or the stem. Suffixes are of two types: grammatical and lexical. Grammatical suffixes (endings or inflections) express grammatical categories (tense, person, case, number): *s* for plural, *-ed* for past tense simple, etc. The function of these inflections is mainly grammatical. The inflected variants of the same lexeme together make up the inflectional paradigm (*eat, eats, ate, eating*).

Derivational affixes (prefixes and suffixes alike) carry meanings and their role is to produce new lexemes when they are added to a root or stem: *un-*, *mis-*, *-less* have a negative meaning and they produce words like *unhappy, unhappiness*. The sum of words created by derivation represents the derivational paradigm of the root word: *form, formal, formality, formalize, formally*, etc.

The majority of prefixes are class-maintaining, i.e. they can change the meaning without changing the morphological status (*happy/unhappy* are both adjectives, *understand/misunderstand* are both verbs).

Some prefixes can be class-changing: *sleep/asleep, slave/enslave, take/mistake*.

Suffixes can also be class-maintaining (*-hood, -ship* in *childhood, friendship*) or class-changing (*-less, -able, -tion* in *educate/education, reach/reachable*). Thus, derivation is a semantic phenomenon that implies and induces change of meaning, but it also belongs to the field of grammar.

Affixes can be analysed in point of their:

- Origin (Germanic: *be-*, *un-*, *out-*, *mis-*, *under-*, *-er*, *-ship*, *-hood*, *-dom* like in *bedazzle, undo, outstand, mistake, understand, writer, friendship, childhood, kingdom*; Romance: *a-*, *ab-*, *ac-*, *com-*, *col-*, *de-*, *-or*, *-age*, *-tion* like in *absence, acknowledge, collide, depart, actor, motion*; Greek: *ec-*, *a-*, *an-*, *di-*, *-ist*, *-ism*, *-ize*, *-ise* like in *eccentric, anomalous, communist, communism*);

- Grammatical category (noun-forming suffixes like *-ship*, *-hood*, *-ness*, *-ity*, *-ment*, *-ism*, *-ation*, *-ure*, *-ese* as in *friendship, childhood, wellness, certainty, tourism, damnation*; adjective-forming suffixes like *-able*, *-ish*, *-ful*, *-less*, *-ed*, *-y*, *-ly*, *-some*, *-ese* in *capable, boyish, careful, blue-eyed, handsome, Japanese*; verb-forming suffixes like *-ize*, *-ise*, *-yze* *-en*, *-f*, *-ify* as in *jeopardize, analyse, lighten*,

*electrify*; adverb-forming suffixes like *-ly*, *-wards*, *-fold*, *-wise* in *happily*, *forwards*, *threefold*, *clockwise*;

– Meaning: we deal with suffixes that carry negative meaning: *a-*, *i-*, *im-*, *di-*, *mis-* *-les* (*apolitical*, *immoral*, *impossible*, *dissatisfied*, *colourless*), endowed with a certain quality: *-ful*, *-ed*, *-ish*, *-ly* (*beautiful*, *blue-eyed*, *girlish*, *friendly*), pointing to the doer of the action: *-er* (*worker*), showing a state or a process: *-dom*, *-hood*, *-ance*, *-ment*, *-ion* (*childhood*, *calmness*, *movement*, *erosion*), a system of philosophy: *-ism*, *-ist* (*socialism*, *socialist*), a type of discourse: *-lese* (in *journalese*, *legalese*, *officialese*) (Vizental 2006: 89–90).

There are noun-forming suffixes (*-er*, *-ist*, *-ee*, *-ess*: *teacher*, *realist*, *absentee*, *heiress*), adjective-forming suffixes (*-ish*, *-ed*, *-ly*, *-y*, *-less*, *-able*, *-ful*: *boyish*, *hooked*, *manly*, *windy*, *fearless*, *readable*), verb-forming suffixes (*-ize*, *-ise*, *-en*, *-fy*, *-ify*: *fertilize*, *whiten*, *intensify*), and adverb-forming suffixes (*-ly*, *-ward*: *beautifully*, *backward*).

Most of the affixes are stylistically neutral. Still, according to Levičchi (1970: 50), a relatively small number of affixes are stylistically charged or marked; among these: *-ster* and *-ard* may lend nouns a deprecating value (*boomster*, *laggard*); *-ling* conveys a derogatory connotation (*princeling*, *weakling*); *-let* is diminutival (*floweret*); *-ie*, *-y*, *-ey* are commonly endearing (*doggie*, *birdie*, *grannie*, *daddy*).

## Deflection or root inflection

Deflection is a special type of derivation consisting in the inflection in the root of the word. It was highly productive in Old English when it produced vowel change: *blood–bleed*, *full–fill*, *food–feed*, *hot–heat*, *long–length*, *song–sing*, *loss–lose*, *breach–break*, *belief–believe*, etc. Change of morphological class may or may not occur. Levičchi (1970: 66) considers that today deflection is not productive anymore.

## Back formation

Back formation is a means of word creation which works the opposite way derivation does. With derivation, an affix is added to the existing lexeme, with back formation the initial or final syllable is dropped. Change of morphological class may or may not occur. *Beggar* gave birth to *beg*, *editor* to *edit*, *burglar* to *burgle*. Today, back formation is used not because of linguistic ignorance, but on purpose, to create new words: *enthusiasm* led to *enthuse*, *paramedical* to *paramedic*, *surveillance* to *surveille*, *surrealist* to *surreal*.

Compounds ending in *-tion*, *-sion*, *-er* can easily suffer back formation: *donation/donate*, *television/televise*, *contraception/contracept*, *blood-transfusion/*

*blood-transfuse*, *baby-sitter/baby-sit*. Initial syllables can also be interpreted as prefixes. This is the way Hungarian has created *monokini* on the basis of *bikini* (interpreting *bi-* as meaning *swimming suit consisting of two pieces*) (Vizental 2006: 92). Let us mention some other examples of back formation, namely verbs created through dropping the final syllable: *to force-land* (*forced landing*), *to finger-print* (*finger-printing*).

## Conversion

Conversion is also called *zero derivation*. It is the most productive means of creating new words. Conversion means using a word that is viewed as belonging to a certain grammatical category as if it belonged to another.

Among the most common types of conversion, we mention:

– Noun to verb: *water/to water*, *mail/to mail*, *bridge/to bridge*, *book/to book*, *hammer/to hammer*, *network/to network*, *data-bank/to data-bank*.

– Verb to noun: *to hit/hit*, *to call/call*, *to drive/drive*, *to guess/guess*, *to broadcast/broadcast*, *to commute/commute*, *to interrupt/an interrupt*, *to show off/a show-off*, *to drive in/a drive-in*.

– Adjective to noun: *rich/the rich*, *English/the English*, *gay/a gay*, *dyslexic/a dyslexic*, *infallible/an infallible*.

– Noun to adjective: *a chicken farm*, *peace talks*, *a trial match*, *field-flower*.

– Adjective to verb: *better/to better*, *open/to open*, *empty/to empty*.

– Interjection to verb: *to zoom in*.

Converted words can be divided into:

“a) words that have been incorporated into the general stock of the English language, e.g. *to tattoo*, *go*, *to star*, etc. b) words that are converted occasionally (as nonce words)” (Levičchi 1970: 53). *Nonce words* are a peculiar type of neologism (*nonce*, from the Middle English *for the nones* = *for that time*), words and phrases used only once in a certain context and left outside the general lexicon:

e.g. *ribbandry* (useless going from one shop to another), *cleptopigia* (the mania of stealing pigs – O. Henry), *lordolatry* (cow-towing [*sic*] (kowtowing) before titles – Thackeray). In a wider sense, nonce words may include all the words and phrases which, on various occasions (not necessarily once only), their inventors tried to foist into the language, with the result that they have remained in its archives. When obviously superfluous, nonce words are very much like barbarisms (Levičchi 1970: 114).

## Translation loans

It is also a kind of conversion, meaning passage from one language to another. The number of English loanwords is tremendous in Romanian especially, but in Hungarian as well. The most important domains are: IT and computers, commerce, medicine, office language, lifestyle, sciences and technology, advertising, banking, communication, mass media, sports, high life, gastronomy, politics, education, and teen language. Vizental (2006: 97) warns against the overuse of such translation loans, especially in case there is a perfectly valid vernacular term for them (e.g. *printare* vs. *listare*). She also mentions cases of corruption (*blugi* from *blue jeans*), stupid adaptation of phrases (*a zuma* from *to zoom*), etc.

Among translation loans, Levitchi (1970: 42) enumerates the English words *masterpiece* (German *Meisterstück*), *place in the sun* (German *Platz der Sonne*), *homesickness* (German *Heimweh*), and *labour day* (from Russian). From the viewpoint of translation techniques, all these elements are cases of calque.

## Composition

Composition is also a highly productive word-formation technique, relying on the formation of a new word from two or more stems. It leads to the so-called compound words, the meaning of which can be transparent, semi-transparent, or opaque.

Composition occurs in every morphological class.

English compound nouns are numerous and can be written separately, with or without a hyphen. They can consist of:

- Noun + noun: *sunflower, hedgehog, skinhead, wheel-chair, family planning*.
- Gerund + noun: *fishing rod, walking stick*.
- Noun + verb: *birth-control, sunshine*.
- Adjective + noun: *blackboard, fast-food, software*.
- Pronoun + noun: *he-goat, she-wolf*.
- Verb + noun: *breakfast, pickpocket*.
- Verb + verb: *a make-believe*.
- Adverb + verb: *welcome, upgrade, download, overcome*.
- Verb + particle: *make-up, drawback, breakthrough*.
- Phrase compounds: *son-in-law, forget-me-not*.

Compound adjectives may consist of:

- Noun + adjective/participle: *crystal-clear, colour-blind, water proof, self-made*.
- Noun + noun: *coffee-table dishes*.
- Adjective + adjective/adverb: *bitter-sweet, dark-blue, deep purple*.
- Adverb + adjective: *over-qualified, uptight*.

- Adverb + participle: *easy-going, self-tanning*.
- Preposition/adverb + noun: *upbeat, up-to-date, cross-country*.
- Phrase compounds: *do-it-yourself course, one-touch-easy telephone*.

Compound verbs are generally written in one word or with compulsory hyphen:

- Noun + verb: *brainwash, carbon-date, breast-feed*.
- Adjective + verb: *whitewash, sweet-talk, bad-mouth, hot-wire a car*.
- Verb + verb: *typewrite, daresay*.
- Adverb + verb: *download, outdo, broadcast, backslide*, etc. (Vizental 2006: 98–101).

Compound adverbs are of the following type: *beforehand, throughout, henceforward*, etc.

Compound prepositions are the following examples: *within, into*, etc.

Sometimes, it is not easy at all to distinguish true compounds from free combinations of words. Levițchi (1970: 55) comes up with the following criteria:

- In a compound, the semantic-grammatical connection between the constituents is so tight that one could compare the compound with one simple word (e.g. *blackboard* is felt as a simple word, just like the other elements of the series *chair, table, or map*). The same applies to *exercise-book, butterfly, sunheat, etc.*). In compounds, whenever the first component is an adjective, it cannot be subjected to degrees of comparison: e.g. *blackboard* vs. *a good board, a better board*.
- In free combinations, the close semantic connection is absent: *blackboard* vs. *a white board, an oak board; exercise-book* vs. *a bad book, an interesting book, a thick book*, etc.

In Romanian, compound words are often marked stylistically (for instance, many compounds made up of two nouns belong to the technical or scientific register: e.g. *cai-putere, ani-lumină*). Nevertheless, Levițchi (1970: 59–60) states that in English the situation is slightly different. Compounds are unidiomatic when their meaning is construed from the meaning of the constituent words (*sunray, river-bank*) and they are idiomatic when the meaning is not the sum of the meanings of the component parts (*lazybones, no-good*). Compound verbs composed with adverbial particles often have a colloquial or informal character (*to make out, to put down*). Compounds based on onomatopoeic reduplications (alliteration, assonance, repetition, rhyme) are either colloquial or humorous (*hubble-bubble, pit-pat*) or they belong to childspeech (*tick-tack, piggywiggy*).

## Blending

Blending means fusing two words together. Blends are also called *telescoped* or *portmanteau words*; they are a kind of disguised compounds with a high degree of fusion or blending, in which it is difficult to distinguish between the elements

(Vizental 2006: 102). Among the most common blends, we mention: *smog* (*smoke* + *fog*), *to hustle* (*to hurry* + *bustle*), *motel* (*motor* + *hotel*), *to squash* (*to squeeze* + *crash*) or the more recent blends like *to guesstimate* (*guess* + *estimate*), *The Chunnel* (*channel* + *tunnel*), *slanguage* (*slang* + *language*), *brunch* (*breakfast* + *lunch*), *cyborg* (*cybernetic* + *organism*), *sharenting* (*share* + *parenting*), *spork* (*spoon* + *fork*), *Brexit* (*Britain's* + *exit*).

The domain which most frequently uses blends is advertising, due to these units' informative and suggestive power.

## Contraction

Contraction is also called *shortening* or *clipping*. It means the partial reduction of a word (Vizental 2006: 103–104). There are three main types of contraction:

– Aphaeresis: the reduction of the initial segment of the word (*phone/telephone*, *car/motor-car*, *story/history*, *change/exchange*, *fence/defence*, *sample/example*, *plot/complot*). The meaning of the reduced variant may or may not differ from the meaning of the original term. With contracted grammatical forms (*'l/will*, *'d/ should*, *had*), the difference is only stylistic.

– Syncope: the reduction of the middle part of the word: *ma'am* (*madam*), *n't* (*not*), *o'er* (*over*). These are mainly used for stylistic purposes. Nevertheless, Levičchi (1970: 63) considers that syncope may have at least three stylistic implications: neutral (with very old contracted forms like *captain*); poetical (*whoe'er/whoever*, *ta'en/taken*) and colloquial (*ma'am/madam*).

– Apocope: the reduction of the final segment of the word (even compounds). It is frequently used in colloquial style. Unlike back formation, it does not involve the change of grammatical category: *exam*, *lab*, *Maths*, *info*, *bi*, *porn*, *mike*, *pub*, *zoo*, *show-biz*, *high-tech*, *sci-fi*, *sitcom*, *co-ed*, *hippo*, *comfy*, *to demob*, *prefab* (from *examination*, *laboratory*, *mathematics*, *information*, *bisexual*, *pornography*, *microphone*, *public house*, *zoological garden*, *show business*, *high-technology*, *science-fiction*, *situation comedy*, *co-educated*, *hippopotamus*, *comfortable*, *to demobilize*, *prefabricated*).

## Abbreviation

Abbreviation means the reduction of the word/word group to its initial letter(s). There are several ways of reading abbreviations:

– As individual letters : TV, BBC, the U, CPA (Certified Public Accountant), PO (prisoner of war), MO (modus operandi), MP, BA, PhD, LA, NYPD. Some of these can be pluralized: PCs, CDs, or inflected like regular verbs (*he OK-ed it*). Modern



communication technology has created abbreviations like *np* (no problem), *asap* (*as soon as possible*). Some abbreviations have become so common that nobody remembers the original term (DVD stands for *digital versatile disk*).

– As a single word: in this case, abbreviations are called *acronyms*: laser (*light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation*), radar (*radio detection and ranging*), scuba (*self-contained underwater breathing apparatus*), NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), UNO (United Nations Organization), UFO (*unidentified flying object*), SALT (*Strategic Arms Limitation Talks*), WASP (*White Anglo-Saxon Protestant*), etc. More recently, other acronyms like Yuppie (*young urban professional*) or DINK (*double income, no kids*) have been created. Some of them have suffered loan translation, and in today's Hungarian words like *szingli*, *dinki*, etc. are widely used.

– When abbreviation refers only to the written form and when reading we read words fully: titles and honorifics (Mr, Dr, Hon., Prof.) units of measurement (kg, ft), writing and editing (vol., p., pp., ff., e.g., i.e.).

– Abbreviation based on homonymy, or similar pronunciation of sounds (b for *be*, 4 for *for*, u for *you*). These are mainly used in teen language, Internet slang, or advertisers (Vizental 2006: 104–106).

## Word coinage

Word coinage, also called *word manufacture*, is creating or building new words *ex nihilo*, i.e. from nothing. Among people who use coin words frequently, we mention writers (*Lilliputian*/Swift, *Gargantua*/Rabelais), scientists. In science, the majority of new words are created from Greek or Latin components (*biology*, *telephone*, *dictaphone*, *semasiology*, etc.). Another way of coining words is through eponyms (*lynch* from the name of Judge Lynch, *boycott* from the name of captain Boycott, *macadam* and *macadamize* from the name of John MacAdam, or *bedlam* from the name of Bedlam Hospital from London).

## Onomatopoeia and ablaut

Onomatopoeia and ablaut are word-coining techniques that rely on phonological principles.

Onomatopoeia refers to creating new lexemes by imitating natural sounds. They can function as:

- Nouns: *buzz*, *cuckoo*, *crack*, *snap*, *splash*.
- Adjectives: *crunchy*, *yummy*, *chewy*.
- Verbs: *to crack*, *to snap*, *to snarl*, *to squeak*.
- Interjections: *ouch*, *wow*, *yuck* (Vizental 2006: 108).

Ablaut is related to root inflection or deflection. The latter was operational in Middle English, while ablaut is still productive today. It consists of altering the root sound: *ride-ode-ridden*, *chit-chat*, *ding-dong*, *zigzag*.

### c. Change of meaning

Change of meaning is an efficient and economical way of expanding the vocabulary of a language. Words may undergo a process of change of meaning for various reasons:

- a. transfer from concrete to abstract: *to grasp* (to seize/to understand);
- b. transfer from particular to general: *home* (building where one lives/country of origin), *background* (ground in the rear/origin, education, experience);
- c. transfer from one domain to another: passage from general language to specialized vocabulary and vice versa (*cell*, *file*, *mouse*);
- d. figurative usage or figurative transfer of meaning (metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole).

Changes of meaning operate in four directions: extension or generalization of meaning, narrowing of meaning, degradation of meaning, elevation of meaning.

- a. Extension or generalization of meaning means that the sense of the word is enriched: e.g. *person*, initially meant the mask worn by actors in ancient times, later on, the meaning was extended to any human being;
- b. Narrowing of meaning is the gradual restriction of the meaning: e.g. *room* used to mean space, today it refers to a restricted kind of place;
- c. Degradation of meaning is the process through which a word gradually becomes deprecating: e.g. *knave* (initially, it meant boy, today it means a person with no honour and no principles, *gay* (used to mean cheerful, today it is used to refer to homosexuals);
- d. Elevation of meaning is the process by which a word reaches a higher status: e.g. *minister* used to mean servant, today it means a diplomatic representative.

Not only the sound form but also the meaning of the word may undergo changes in the course of the historical development of language. Change of meaning or semantic change refers to the phenomenon of change that affects the semantic burden of lexemes. There are several causes that may lead to semantic change:

- a. extra-linguistic causes or the various changes in the life of the speech community, changes in economic and social structure, changes in ideas, scientific concepts, way of life, and other spheres of human activities as reflected in word meanings;
- b. linguistic causes: factors acting within the language system. The commonest form which this influence takes is the so-called ellipsis. Another linguistic cause is discrimination of synonyms which can be illustrated by the semantic development of a number of words.

The word *land*, e.g., in Old English (*OE.* land) meant both 'solid part of earth's surface' and 'the territory of a nation'. When in the Middle English period the word *country* (*OF:* contree) was borrowed as its synonym, the meaning of the word *land* was somewhat altered and 'the territory of a nation' came to be denoted mainly by the borrowed word *country*. Some semantic changes may be accounted for by the influence of a peculiar factor usually referred to as linguistic analogy. It was found out that if one of the members of a synonymic set acquires a new meaning other members of this set change their meanings too. It was observed that all English adverbs which acquired the meaning 'rapidly' (in a certain period of time – before 1300) always develop the meaning 'immediately'; similarly, verbs synonymous with *catch*, e.g. *grasp*, *get*, etc., by semantic extension acquired another meaning – 'to understand' (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 28).

Dirk Geeraerts, in his *Theories of lexical semantics* (2009), distinguishes between the following major groups of meaning change:

1. The non-analogical changes of denotational meaning comprising the classical quartet of specialization, generalization, metonymy, and metaphor.
2. Emotive meaning change: pejorative change and amelioration.

Ginzburg et alii (1979), on the other hand, talk about similarity of meanings or metaphor, contiguity of meanings or metonymy, and two major cases of meaning change: the one affecting denotation (restriction and extension) and the other one affecting connotation (pejorative and ameliorative meaning). Semantic change may affect either the denotational meaning of the word (leading to restriction and extension of meaning) or its connotational meaning (leading to amelioration and deterioration of meaning). It is more usual that the denotational component of the lexical meaning is affected, while the connotational component remains unaltered.

Thus, semantic changes in the denotational component may bring about the extension or the restriction of meaning. The change in the connotational component may result in the pejorative or ameliorative development of meaning.

Thus, in this sense, we will include here the following cases of meaning change:

- Metaphor or similarity of meanings;
- Metonymy or contiguity of meanings;
- Restriction of meaning or narrowing of meaning (affecting the denotational component);
- Specialization of meaning (affecting the denotational component);
- Extension of meaning, or widening of meaning (affecting the denotational component);
- Generalization of meaning (affecting the denotational component);
- Degradation, degeneration of meaning, or pejorative meaning (affecting the connotational component);

– Elevation or amelioration of meaning (affecting the connotational component).

## Similarity of meanings, or metaphor

Similarity of meanings, or metaphor may be described as a semantic process of associating two referents, one of which in some way resembles the other. Metaphor was originally a rhetorical concept, which now presents a wide linguistic application.

Metaphors are based on similarity or analogy.

English *germ* is a good example of a metaphor-based meaning change. The earlier meaning of this word was ‘seed’, clearly visible in a sentence like (2), from 1802: *The germ grows up in the spring, upon a fruit stalk, accompanied with leaves* (OED *germ*). The word’s application to the microscopic ‘seeds’ of disease is a metaphorical transfer: ailments are likened to plants, giving them ‘seeds’ from which they develop. The Old French word for ‘head’, *test*, is another example of metaphorical development. Originally, *test* meant ‘pot’ or ‘piece of broken pot’: the semantic extension to ‘head’ is said to be the result of a metaphor current among soldiers, in which battle was colourfully described as ‘smashing pots’. Exactly the same metaphor explains the sense development of German *Kopf* ‘head’, which used to mean ‘cup’. The use of *monkey*, *pig*, *sow*, etc. in pejorative reference to people can also be seen as the result of a metaphor based on perceived similarity with the animals concerned. Another, very common, metaphor relates space and time. It is seen in the use of verbs with spatial meanings in temporal ones, as when English conveys the ‘immediate’ future tense using *go* (*I’m going to stop now*), or French uses *venir* ‘come’ to express events in the recent past (*je viens de terminer* ‘I have just finished’, literally ‘I come from finishing’). In these expressions, temporal events are expressed in language on the analogy of spatial ones. Many investigators have commented on the deep-seated nature of this transfer, which is widely attested cross-linguistically (Riemer 2010: 376).

Other authors complete the endless list of examples:

The word *hand*, e.g., acquired in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the meaning of ‘a pointer of a clock or a watch’ because of the similarity of one of the functions performed by the hand (to point at something) and the function of the clockpointer. Since metaphor is based on the perception of similarities, it is only natural that when an analogy is obvious it should give rise to a metaphoric meaning. This can be observed in the wide currency of metaphoric meanings of words denoting parts of the human body in various languages (cf. ‘the leg of the table’, ‘the foot of the hill’, etc.). Sometimes it

is similarity of form, outline, etc. that underlies the metaphor. The words *warm* and *cold* began to denote certain qualities of human voices because of some kind of similarity between these qualities and warm and cold temperature. It is also usual to perceive similarity between colours and emotions.

It has also been observed that in many speech communities colour terms, e.g. the words *black* and *white*, have metaphoric meanings in addition to the literal denotation of colours (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 30).

“Metaphor, on the other hand, is commonly analysed as being based on similarity rather than contiguity” (Geeraerts 2009: 34). Thus, the metaphor is a change of the name of an object by another name on condition that between the two objects exists a similarity, however vague it may be. Metaphor requires only analogy as a necessary condition for its applications. The condition for a word to be a metaphor is that the word should also be used with its proper meaning. It must preserve the capacity of naming the object that is at the basis of the analogy. Metaphoric sense does not exist if proper sense does not exist, as metaphor is founded on the general opposition between proper and figurative, valid for any figure of speech.

Types of metaphor:

– Animate for inanimate: *the head of the community, the foot of the hill, the mouth of the river*;

– Animate for animate: *X is a goose, He is a Casanova*;

– Inanimate for animate: the Romanian expression *fluierul piciorului* (*shin-bone*);

– Inanimate for inanimate: *patul armei* (*buttstock*) (Zdrenghia 1977: 63).

Metaphors rely on conceptual anomaly and pragmatic synonymy; for instance, *He is a bear* is semantically an anomalous sentence (clashes between [+HUMAN] and [-HUMAN]), however, pragmatically, *bear* is synonymous with a big and clumsy person.

Metaphor can also rely on pragmatic antonymy: abusive terms are sometimes used to enhance the positive affective load of their message (*old dog* can mean a very good old friend).

Degraded or faded metaphors “still convey to readers and listeners some of their initial freshness, although they have already become trite. ... *the ship of the desert* is commonplace enough now, yet the initial graphicalness has not been lost altogether. The same may be said about hosts of words used figuratively, e.g. *the depth of winter, the depth of night, the legs of a table, the mouth of a river*” (Levițchi 1970: 81). Degraded metaphors are often based on the use of nouns denoting animals to refer to human beings (zoosemy): e.g. *fox, bookworm, chicken, monkey, or tigress*. Idioms are also often based on degraded metaphors (*to break the ice, on the other hand*).

Dead metaphors have lost all metaphorical connotation (*daisy*, which comes from Old English *daeges eage*, *the day's eye*, or *window*, coming from Old English *windes ege*, *the wind's eye*).

“As a rule, live metaphors should be translated by live metaphors, degraded by degraded and dead by dead ones. If this correspondence is not observed, the stylistic framework of the original text may be easily misinterpreted. It stands to reason that the same recommendation applies to all figures of speech that can be classified diachronically as live, degraded, and dead” (Leviṭchi 1970: 81).

## Contiguity of meanings, or metonymy

Contiguity of meanings, or metonymy may be described as the semantic process of associating two referents one of which makes part of the other or is closely connected with it.

This can be perhaps best illustrated by the use of the word *tongue* – ‘the organ of speech’ – in the meaning of ‘language’. “The word *bench* acquired the meaning ‘judges, magistrates’ because it was on the bench that the judges used to sit in law courts, similarly the House acquired the meaning of ‘members of the House’ (Parliament)” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 30).

It is generally held that metaphor plays a more important role in the change of meaning than metonymy. There are some semantic changes that fit into more than the two groups discussed above. A change of meaning may be brought about by the association between the sound forms of two words. “The word *boon* originally meant ‘prayer, petition’, ‘request’, but then came to denote ‘a thing prayed or asked for’. Its current meaning is ‘a blessing, an advantage, a thing to be thanked for’. The change of meaning was probably due to the similarity to the sound-form of the adjective *boon* (an Anglicised form of French *bon* denoting ‘good, nice’)” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 30).

Metonymy is “a figure of speech, by means of which the name of an object is replaced by one of its significant attributes, by some function that it discharges. In other words, metonymy rests on a direct, real semantic connection between the object and its peculiar aspect which is apt to characterize it as a whole, in contrast to metaphor, where this contact is indirect and imaginary” (Leviṭchi 1970: 82).

Metonymic changes are rather common.

A particularly colourful one underlies the word *pupil*, which in English refers both to a student and to the opening in the eye through which light passes. This puzzling polysemy goes back to Latin, where *pupilla* means both ‘small girl, doll’ and ‘pupil’.

This can be explained by metonymy. Our eyes have ‘pupils’ because of the small doll-like image that can be observed there: spatial contiguity,

in other words, underlies the shift. Greek *khōrē* has exactly the same metonymically related meanings. Another example of a metonymic meaning shift is the Romanian word *bărbat* 'husband', which derives from the Latin *barbatus* 'bearded'. If husbands often have beards, the ideas will be conceptually associated (Riemer 2010: 376).

Metonymy (including synecdoche) is a semantic link between two readings of a lexical item that is based on a relationship of contiguity between the referents of the expression in each of those readings. When, for instance, one drinks a whole bottle, it is not the bottle but merely its contents that are consumed: *bottle* can be used to refer to a certain type of recipient, and to the contents of that recipient (Geeraerts 2009: 34).

George Yule also offers a lot of examples of metonymy:

The relatedness of meaning found in polysemy is essentially based on similarity. The *head* of a company is similar to the *head* of a person on top of (and controlling) the body. There is another type of relationship between words, based simply on a close connection in everyday experience. That close connection can be based on a container–contents relation (*bottle – coke; can – juice*), a whole–part relation (*car – wheels; house – roof*) or a representative–symbol relationship (*king – crown; the President – the White House*).

It is our familiarity with metonymy that makes *He drank the whole bottle* easy to understand, although it sounds absurd literally (i.e. he actually drank the liquid contained in the bottle, not the glass object). We also accept *The White House announced ...* or *Downing Street protested ...* without being puzzled that buildings appear to be talking. You use metonymy when you talk about *filling up the car; having a roof over your head; answering the door; giving someone a hand; or needing some wheels*. If you see a mail delivery company called *Spokes*, you know, via metonymy, how they are making those deliveries (i.e. by bicycle).

Many examples of metonymy are highly conventionalized and easy to interpret. However, many others depend on an ability to infer what the speaker has in mind. The metonymy in *Get your butt over here* is easier to understand if you are used to male talk in the United States, *the strings are too quiet* if you're familiar with orchestral music, and *I prefer cable*, if you have a choice in how you receive television programs (in the USA). Making sense of such expressions often depends on context, background knowledge and inference (Yule 1996: 122).

Metonymy is a conditioned change of the name of the objects. The condition is that the new name should indicate something related to the object expressed by the first name. Metonymy is the replacement of one word by another on condition that the two words denote objects between which exists or can exist a qualitative correspondence.



Types of metonymy:

– Person for thing: *I have got a new Shakespeare. The Picasso was sold for a large sum of money.*

– Thing for person: *He is a stone.*

– Material for object: *He spent a lot of gold.*

– Container for content: *I have had a glass too much.*

– Cause for effect: *He should live on his work. I smell a bad affair.*

– Effect for cause: *You are my happiness.*

– The place for the product: *I'll have champagne. I have bought some wonderful china.*

– Symbol for what is symbolizes: *In the name of the British crown* (Zdrengeha 1977: 60–61).

Metonymy relies on pragmatic hyponymy, for instance, in the phrase *from the cradle to the grave* the word *cradle* is a typical accessory of birth, while *grave* is related to death, which means that they are pragmatic hyponyms of birth and death.

**Synecdoche** is a change between two objects on condition that one is comprised in the other. While metonymy conditions the change on the qualitative correspondence between the objects, synecdoche is based on a quantitative relation between the objects.

Types of synecdoche:

– Part for the whole: *She cannot earn her bread* (living).

– Whole for the part: *She was dressed in silk* (silk dress).

– Name in the singular for several objects: *Every man should know that...* (person).

– Genus for the species: *His hair was full of insects.* (lice)

– Species for the genus: *He was the Shakespeare of his age.* (poet)

– Abstract for concrete: *the gentleness of his voice* (gentleness is more abstract than gentle) (Zdrengeha 1977: 61).

## Restriction of meaning, or narrowing of meaning

Restriction of meaning, or narrowing of meaning usually affects denotation. It means the restriction of the semantic capacity of a word in the historical development, e.g. *meat* in OE meant “food and drink”. Narrowing is the restriction of the types or range of referents denoted by the word. “This may be illustrated by the semantic development of the word *hound* (OE. *hund*) which used to denote ‘a dog of any breed’ but now denotes only ‘a dog used in the chase’. This is also the case with the word *fowl* (OE. *fuzol*, *fuzel*), which in old English denoted ‘any bird’, but in Modern English denotes ‘a domestic hen or cock’” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 31).



A special case of restriction is *specialization of meaning*: if the word with the new meaning comes to be used in the specialized vocabulary of some limited group within the speech community, it is the case to speak of specialization of meaning. “For example, we can observe restriction and specialisation of meaning in the case of the verb *to glide* (*OE. glidan*), which had the meaning ‘to move gently and smoothly’ and has now acquired a restricted and specialised meaning ‘to fly with no engine’ (*a glider*)” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 31).

Thus, one common type of change is specialization (also called narrowing), in which a word narrows its range of reference: e.g.:

the English *liquor* used to refer to liquid of any kind: the reference to alcohol was a subsequent specialization.

The English *pavement* originally referred to any paved surface, but specialized to simply cover the footpath on the edge of a street (called *sidewalk* in American English).

The proto-Romance word for ointment, *unctu*, specialized in Romanian so as only to refer to a single type of ‘ointment’, butter (as well as undergoing some phonological changes to become *unt*;) (Riemer 2010: 374).

## Extension of meaning, or widening of meaning

Extension, or widening of meaning is the extension of semantic capacity of a word, i.e. the expansion of polysemy in the course of its historical development, e.g. *manuscript* originally meant “smth hand-written”. The widening of meaning is the application of the word to a wider variety of referents. “This ... may be illustrated by the word *target* which originally meant ‘a small round shield’ (a diminutive of *targe*, cf. *ON. targa*) but now means ‘anything that is fired at’ and also figuratively ‘any result aimed at’” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 31).

A special case of extension is *generalization of meaning*: when the word with the extended meaning passes from the specialized vocabulary into common use. “The word *camp*, which originally was used only as a military term and meant ‘the place where troops are lodged in tents’ (cf. *L. campus* – exercising ground for the army) extended and generalised its meaning and now denotes ‘temporary quarters’ (of travellers, nomads, etc.)” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 31).

“Examples of generalization are *moon* (primarily the earth’s satellite, but extended to any planet’s satellite), and the French *arriver* (which etymologically means ‘to reach the river’s shore, to come to the bank’, but which now signifies ‘to reach a destination’ in general). ... the original meaning may either remain present or may disappear after the development of the new meaning” (Geeraerts 2009: 34).

Thus, the opposite tendency to specialization (narrowing) is generalization (broadening), in which a word’s meaning changes to encompass a wider class of referents. For instance:

*zealot* first referred to members of a Jewish resistance movement against the occupying Romans in the first century A.D.; its contemporary meaning 'fanatical enthusiast' is a later generalization. The French *panier* 'basket' originally meant just a bread-basket; it was subsequently generalized to baskets of any kind. The Latin noun *passer* means 'sparrow', but in a number of Romance languages it has generalized to the meaning 'bird': this is the case, for example, with Spanish *pájaro* and Romanian *pasăre*. The most common verb for *work* in Romance languages, like French *travailler* and Spanish *trabajar*, is a result of a generalization from the Latin *tripaliare* 'torture with a tripalium', a three-spiked torture instrument. The German adverb *sehr* 'very' originally meant 'cruelly' or 'painfully' (a trace of this meaning survives in the verb *versehren* 'injure, hurt'). The shift to 'very' is an example of an extreme generalization that has lost almost all connection with the original sense. A similar change is found in many English intensifier terms, like *terribly* and *awfully* (Riemer 2010: 374).

Semantic specialization and generalization are types of lexical-semantic change by means of which a lexical item develops a new meaning that stands in a relationship of, respectively, subordination or superordination to the older meaning.... Terminologically, 'restriction' and 'narrowing' of meaning equal 'specialization'; 'expansion', 'extension', 'schematization' and 'broadening' of meaning equal 'generalization' (Geeraerts 2009: 34).

Changes in the connotational meaning are usually accompanied by a change in the denotational component. Two other traditional categories in the analysis of meaning change are *pejoration* (Latin *pejor* 'worse') and *amelioration* (Latin *melior* 'better'), which refer to a change in the words' evaluative force.

## Degradation of meaning

Degradation, degeneration of meaning, or pejorative meaning is the semantic change by which, for one reason or another, a word falls into disrepute or acquires some negative emotive charge. Pejorative change is usually a shift towards a (more) derogatory emotive meaning. "An example of pejoration is *silly*, which formerly meant 'deserving sympathy, helpless or simple', but which has come to mean 'showing a lack of good judgement or common sense'" (Geeraerts 2009: 35). Thus, it is a pejorative development or the acquisition by the word of some derogatory emotive charge which can explain that *silly* (originally meaning *happy, simple, blessed, fortunate, deserving sympathy*) has come to mean what it means today (*foolish*). "This new meaning has entirely displaced the original sense. The word *boor* was "originally used to denote 'a villager, a peasant' (cf. *OE. Zebur* 'dweller'), and then acquired a derogatory, contemptuous connotational meaning and came to denote 'a clumsy or ill-bred fellow'" (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 31).

In pejoration, a word takes on negative, insulting meaning. “This is frequently seen with words for animals, which can be used to refer to people negatively or insultingly, as when someone is called a *monkey*, *parasite*, *pig*, *sow*, and so on. ... *Accident* originally meant simply ‘chance event’, but took on the meaning ‘unfavourable chance event’” (Riemer 2010: 37).

## Elevation of meaning

Elevation, or amelioration of meaning is the semantic change in the word, which rises from humble beginning to a position of greater importance. Ameliorative development, or elevation of meaning involves the improvement of the connotational component of meaning. An example could be, in this sense, the word *minister*, “which in one of its meanings originally denoted ‘a servant, an attendant’, but now – ‘a civil servant of higher rank, a person administering a department of state or accredited by one state to another’” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 31).

Ameliorative change is a shift towards a (more) positive emotive meaning. “An example of amelioration is the history of the word *knight*, which originally meant ‘boy, servant’, and thus indicated a considerably more lowly social position than it does now” (Geeraerts 2009: 35).

Amelioration is the opposite process to degradation, in which a word’s meaning changes to become more positively valued. “The normalization of previously proscribed taboo words is a good example. *Bum*, for example, appears to be gaining somewhat in social acceptability, at least in Australian English. It has thus started on the path to what could be full ameliorization: this would be attained if it eventually became fully synonymous with *bottom*. Another example of ameliorization is provided by English *nice*. The earliest meaning of this adjective, found in Middle English, is ‘simple, foolish, silly, ignorant’; the basic modern sense, ‘agreeable, pleasant, satisfactory, attractive’ is not attested until the eighteenth century” (Riemer 2010: 375).

It is important to note that within derivational clusters or paradigms a change in the connotational meaning of one member does not necessarily affect the others. This peculiarity can be observed in the words *accident* and *accidental*: “the lexical meaning of the noun *accident* has undergone pejorative development and denotes not only ‘something that happens by chance’, but usually ‘something unfortunate’. The derived adjective *accidental* does not possess in its semantic structure this negative connotational meaning (also *fortune*: bad fortune, good fortune and *fortunate*)” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 32).

Pejorative and ameliorative changes may or may not be accompanied by denotational changes, and the pejorative or ameliorative change may or may not involve the retention of the original meaning.

We need to clarify the relationship between pejorative and ameliorative shifts, on the one hand, and euphemism and dysphemism, on the other. *Euphemism* is the use of a positively (or less negatively) connoted word instead of a negatively connoted one with more or less the same denotational meaning. Thus, *to pass away* or *to part with this life* are euphemistic expressions for *to die*, just like *public woman* and *prostitute* for *whore*. *Dysphemism* is the use of a more negatively connoted, harsher, more offensive word, like calling a *cemetery* a *boneyard*. Now, note that euphemism presupposes a particular emotive value in the euphemistic expression, but does not as such change that value. Using *prostitute* as a euphemism for *whore* presupposes that the former word has less negative overtones than the latter, but it does not change those overtones: if it did, there would be no euphemistic effect. That is to say, whereas pejorative change is a diachronic semasiological process, devices such as euphemism and dysphemism primarily involve synchronic stylistic choices. However, the repeated use of a euphemism can be the cause of a semasiological change. The euphemistic effect may, in fact, wear off; the negative evaluation of the referent of the expression then gradually undermines the original euphemistic value of the expression. That is why some euphemisms are regularly replaced by others: *cripple* gave way to *handicapped*, (which) gave way to *disabled*, (which) gave way to *physically challenged* (Geeraerts 2009: 36).

The term *euphemism* comes from the Greek word *euphemos* meaning *good sound or omen*; (*euphemismos* = to use a good or auspicious word for an evil or inauspicious one). Euphemism is defined as:

‘the practice of referring to something offensive or indelicate in terms that make it sound more pleasant or becoming than it really is’ ... In other words, the euphemism is a pleasant metaphoric label for some real-world thing or situation which is perceived as unpleasant. Some factual realities have a high potential of embarrassing or hurting feelings, e.g. those related to race, to disease and death, to physical or moral handicaps, or to the ‘taboo-ridden subjects’ of sex and the excretive processes of the body. In their desire to ‘purge the subject of its damaging affective associations’ and refer to the factual reality in a more delicate and fanciful way, speakers often use euphemistic ‘purr words’ whose aim is to minimize the unpleasant associations of a term, e.g. ‘senior citizens’ instead of ‘old people’; ‘to put to sleep’ instead of ‘to kill (an animal)’; etc. (Vizental 2007: 120–137).

Euphemism, or ‘well-speaking’, is the figure of speech created with the specific role of down-toning or concealing all negative traits of the referent and enhancing its image.

Leech compares euphemism to a ‘linguistic disinfectant’: a lexical item with unpleasant or offensive connotations is replaced with one that makes no reference to the unpleasant aspect of the subject: ‘intercourse’ makes

no direct reference to sexual contact, but merely to human relations; 'African American' does not mention the colour of the person's skin; 'second-hand' (cars, books, clothes) avoids direct reference to the fact that the products have already been used; 'apartheid' (i.e. the practice of racial discrimination formerly practiced in South Africa) means "separatehood" (< 'apart' = separate), skipping any mention whatsoever of the 'colour bar' and of racial discrimination; etc. (Vizental 2007: 120).

Among the most productive domains for euphemisms, Vizental (2007: 120–121) mentions:

- racial issues: e.g. the word *Negro* has been eluded by using phrases such as *coloured people* or *Afro-Americans/African-Americans*;

- terms denoting physical or mental ailments: the words *cripple* is replaced by roundabout phrases, such as: *a (physically) handicapped person, a person with a (physical) handicap, a physically disabled/impaired person, a physically challenged person*; the *lunatic asylum* is referred to as the *psychiatric ward*; terms referring to mental insanity are also roundabout: *insane* (i.e. 'insane' – 'not sane'), *demented* ('dementia' – 'out of mind'); *mentally deranged/disturbed/impaired, unbalanced, not in one's right mind, out of one's senses*, etc.;

- death is a sensible societal subject, which is why there is a wide range of terms which help us to avoid direct reference to the act of dying, e.g.: *demise* (slightly archaic), *to de cease, to expire, to succumb, to pass away, to be gone, to be no more, to close one's eyes, to depart (this life), to give up the ghost, to go the way of all flesh, to join the majority, to meet one's Maker, to bite the dust, to push up the daisies*, etc.;

- information related to the bodily functions: the terms *water closet* is replaced by: *bathroom, lavatory, loo, rest-room, cloak room, powder room, toilet, the ladies'/gentlemen's room, public convenience, public bathroom*, etc.;

- use of scatological vocabulary (i.e. direct reference to the excremental processes) is skilfully avoided by describing the act indirectly (e.g. *to pass water* instead of *to urinate*) or by referring in a roundabout way to the place where the process takes place (e.g. *go to the loo; wash my hands; or powder my nose*; etc.);

Euphemisms are extremely numerous in the USA, where many modest positions or professions are referred to with the help of euphemistic expressions:

- *lady*: in the UK, the term is a title of nobility; in the USA, it is used indiscriminately in compounds such as *sales lady, lady doctor, lady inspector*, etc.;

- *engineer*: the British *hairdresser* is, in the USA, an *appearance engineer*; the *rat-catcher* has become an *exterminating engineer*;

- *director*: the British *undertaker* is in US a *funeral director*;

- *operative* (= 'worker'): a *garbage/refuse collector* is called a *cleansing department operative*;

- *academy*: the British *driving school* is, in the USA, a *driving academy*; the *riding school* is referred to as a *riding academy*;

– *parlour*: as in *beauty parlour* (= *beauty salon* or *beauty shop*), *pizza parlour*;  
 – *artist* or *stylist*: the *barber* is a *tonsonial artist* or a *hair stylist* (Vizental 2007: 138).

Euphemisms have an important image-building potential, and this is extensively exploited by advertisers.

The changes of meaning called figures of speech are stylistic devices. Among other stylistic devices, we mention *hyperboles*, *personifications*, and *litotes*.

**Hyperbole** involves “the exaggerated expression of a negative or positive appreciation of something, such as when someone is called an *absolute genius* when he has merely had a single bright idea or when, conversely, someone’s behaviour is called *moronic* when it is merely unwise or foolish” (Geeraerts 2009: 36).

The hyperbole is an intentional and obvious exaggeration for the sake of emphasis, not for the sake of deception. Hyperbolic phrases like *I’m starving*, *you are killing me*, *I nearly died* are commonplace in everyday communication. Many hyperbolic phrases have become idiomatic: *a thousand thanks*, *scared to death*, *I shed floods of tears*. Hyperbole is based on pragmatic hyponymy: *enormous* is a supernym of *big*. Hyperboles may be lexical or standardized (*scared to death*, *wet to the bone*, *immensely obliged*, *to make mountains out of molehills*) and non-standardized (*The voices of the hills did his obey*) (Levičchi 1970: 83).

**Litotes** represent the converse of hyperbole:

expressing something in an attenuated way, like saying *I wouldn’t mind* when you mean *I’d very much love to*. Now, whereas the use of hyperbole initially presupposes the stronger negative force of a word such as *moronic* as against unwise or foolish, the repeated use of the hyperbolic expression may erode its emotive force. Thus, *dreadful* in expressions like *to be dreadfully sorry* has gone through an ameliorative shift from ‘to be dreaded’ to the neutral meaning ‘enormous’, the link between both being the hyperbolic use of the original meaning (Geeraerts 2009: 36).

The litotes or understatements are the opposite of hyperbole, i.e. the diminishing of the qualities of the designated object for reasons of:

- Modesty: *a bit of luck*, *a bite to eat*, *a moment of your time*;
- Negative exaggeration: *not have an ounce of energy*, *not to lay a finger on somebody*;
- Euphemistic circumlocution: *to have had a glass (too many)* (Vizental 2007: 125–126).

Litotes and irony exploit pragmatic antonymy: a modest *not too bad* means, in fact, *quite good*. Negative litotes, i.e. expressing an affirmative by grammatically negating its contrary, is used to express:

- Modest understatement: *not too bad*;
- Irony: *not too successful* (Vizental 2007: 125–126).

We add that the same technique (of using *not too* or *not very* together with an adjective with opposite meaning) can be used to refer to negative features in a polite manner: instead of saying that *someone is lazy*, we use this pragmatic politeness approach and say that *he/she is not very hardworking*.

**Personification** is the representation of a thing or abstraction in the form of a person (*The forest is singing*). Some idiomatic phrases also rely on personification: *heaven knows, to get the heart of something* (Vizental 2007: 125).

We cannot close the section dedicated to changes of meaning without describing one more linguistic phenomenon, i.e. neologisms, and the role they play in the process of meaning changes.

### **Neologisms and change of meaning**

Neologisms are coined or borrowed for a number of reasons: name a recently invented concept or device, obtain special effects, create brands or labels.

Neologisms have a number of functions and roles:

- concept-defining role (call into existence and define, name concepts): e.g. *iPad, blog*);

- abbreviatory function (give a succinct, precise linguistic equivalent for objects that would otherwise require a long definition): e.g. *lézer* (laser), *Romanul său e un bestseller* (*His novel is a bestseller*.);

- image-building function: e.g. French loans may endow the user with an air of French-ness: *a színház rebranding-je* (*the rebranding of the theatre*), *je m'enfichism-ul său* (*from the French expression je m'en fiche = I couldn't care less*).

Neologisms undergo a process of lexicalization before they are fully assimilated in the language (nonce formation, institutionalization, becoming type-specific, lexicalization). There are several factors that influence the assimilation and acceptance of neologisms and new terms into a language:

- the status and circulation of the newspaper or channel that launched it;
- the importance of the event or discovery it designates;
- the attitude of the society towards that specific event or discovery;
- the status of the person who coined it;

- the urgency of the need for new concepts to cover the new realities (Vizental 2007: 141).

During the process of lexicalization,<sup>1</sup> neologisms may suffer changes of form and/or meaning.

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1 A language is a living organism which constantly changes. Words that are no longer used become archaic or simply die out, while other words appear (by borrowing or coinage). Every social and economic change is reflected in the language through a number of words that appear, a process which is called lexicalization.



## SEMANTICS AND TRANSLATION

In this chapter, we shall focus on the following aspects: the issue of semantic translation; the issue of semantic universals and translation universals; the issue of translatable and non-translatable units of language; the semantic issues translators should be careful with (synonymy, polysemy, metaphorical expressions, etc.).

### Semantic translation

The difference between communicative translation and semantic translation is one more aspect of semantics and translation intertwining.

Communicative translation is oriented towards the needs of the TL recipient. Communicative translation contrasts with word-for-word translation, literal translation. “When producing a communicative translation, the translator is permitted greater freedom to interpret ST and will consequently smooth over irregularities of style, remove ambiguities and even correct the author’s factual errors. ... Examples of text-types for which this mode of translation would be appropriate include journalistic writing, textbooks, public notices and indeed most non-literary genres” (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 22). According to Shuttleworth and Cowie’s *Dictionary of translation studies*, pragmatic translation is the kind of translation which pays attention not only to denotative meaning but also to the way utterances are used in communicative situations and the way we interpret them in context. Pragmatic translation takes into account connotative meaning, allusion, interpersonal aspects of communication such as implicature, tone, or register. Among pragmatic translations, one can cite: scientific treatises, government documents, instructions, descriptions, directions that appear on packaged goods. It should be noted that “communicative translation is not intended to be a completely cut-and-dried category; furthermore, along with semantic translation it is intended to represent the middle ground of translation practice” (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 22).

But what exactly is semantic translation? Sorea summarizes the difference between communicative, or pragmatic translation and semantic translation in the following table:



**Table 4.**

<b>SEMANTIC translation</b>	<b>COMMUNICATIVE/ PRAGMATIC translation</b>
Author-centred	Reader-centred
Related to thought	Related to speech
faithful	effective
More detailed but more awkward	Simpler, clearer
personal	social
SL-biased	TL-biased
Tendency to over-translate	Tendency to under-translate
Inferior to the original	Possibly better than the original
Eternal, decontextualized	Existential, context-dependent
Wide, universal	Tailor-made, targeted for a specific readership
True version	Felicitous version
Meaning-centred	Message-centred

(Sorea 2007: 72)

Semantic translation is the type of translation in which:

the translator attempts, within the bare syntactic and semantic constraints of the TL, to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the author. A semantic translation consequently tends to strive to reproduce the form of the original as closely as TL norms will allow; furthermore, no effort is made to shift ST into a target cultural context. Greater attention is paid to rendering the author's original thought-processes in TL, rather than attempting to re-interpret ST in a way which the translator considers more appropriate for the target setting; a semantic translation will therefore treat the original words as sacred, even if this requires reproducing inconsistencies, ambiguities and errors (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 151).

The types of texts which generally require a semantic type of approach are literary, technical and scientific texts, in which the language of ST is as important as the content. Just as communicative translation, semantic translation is “not intended to be a completely watertight category” (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 151).

Alongside with semantic translation, we should highlight that there is a so-called *sense-for-sense translation* as well, which refers to the type of translation emphasizing transfer of the meaning or spirit of a source text over an accurate reproduction of the original wording. Sense-for-sense translation is also called *free translation*, and it is the opposite of *word-for-word* (or literal) translation. “The purpose of such a policy is to accommodate the needs of the TL reader by producing a text which conforms to the linguistic and textual norms of the target language and culture and which does not therefore sound foreign”

(Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 151). The unit of translation in sense-for-sense or free translation “might be anything up to a sentence (or more) even if the content of the ST in question could be reproduced satisfactorily on the word or group level” (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 63). Sense-for-sense translation is thus more target-language-oriented than literal translations.

As Gorea states:

A faithful translation attempts to reproduce the precise contextual meaning of the original text within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures. It transfers cultural words and preserves the degree of grammatical and lexical *abnormality* (deviation from SL norms) in the translation. It attempts to be completely faithful to the intentions and the text-realization of the SL writer.

Semantic translation differs from faithful translation only in, as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value, that is, the beautiful and natural sounds of the SL text, compromising on meaning where appropriate so that no assonance, word-play or repetition jars in the finished version. Communicative translation attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership.<sup>1</sup>

## The issue of semantic universals and translation universals

The words of different languages which are similar or identical in lexical meaning, especially in the denotational meaning, are termed correlated words. Semantic correlation, however, is not to be interpreted as semantic identity, argues Ginzburg (1979: 37), as languages differ not only in the sound form of words; their systems of meanings are also different.

It follows that the semantic structures of correlated words of two different languages cannot be coextensive, i.e. can never *cover each other*. A careful analysis invariably shows that semantic relationship between correlated words, especially polysemantic words, is very complex. The actual meanings of polysemantic words and their arrangement in the semantic structure of correlated words in different languages may be altogether different... As a rule, it is only the central meaning that is to a great extent identical; all other meanings or the majority of meanings usually differ” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 37).

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1 Lucia Gorea, *Lost in translation – Beyond words*. Downloaded from: <http://www.cttic.org/ACTI/2012/Actes/Lucia%20Gorea.pdf>. 3–4.

Despite this huge complexity of meanings, more and more people speak foreign languages and more and more translations are made. In translation studies, one of the most important issues, linked to semantics, is the idea of translation universals. We will try to see whether translation universals and semantic universals overlap.

One recent trend in Translation Studies has been the search for what several scholars have called translation universals... Other scholars have preferred to use labels such as regularities, patterns, general tendencies or translation laws. All these terms refer to the underlying intuition that translations seem to share certain linguistic features regardless of the language pairs or text types concerned.

Some of these features can be formulated as differences with respect to source texts (such as: a tendency for translations to reduce repetition, or to be more standardized in style, or to be marked by interference). Other potentially distinguishing features are defined with reference to non-translated native texts in the target language (such as: a tendency to use a more restricted lexis, more simplified syntax, fewer target-language-specific items). The impulse to look for such universals stems partly from similar movements in general linguistics since Chomsky, and partly from computer programs enabling the quantitative analysis of large electronic corpora of various kinds. Insofar as evidence for translation universals is found, we can speculate that the causes for such widespread features may ultimately be cognitive ones, relating to the ways translators process and store language material.<sup>2</sup>

Universals of translation are a number of features of TT, “which are posited by some as being the almost inevitable by-products of the process of translation, irrespective of the specific language pair involved” (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 193).

Mona Baker (1993: 243) defines translation universals as “features which typically occur in translated text rather than original utterances and which are not the result of interference from specific linguistic systems”. She states that there are some features which can be considered translation universals:

- A tendency towards explicitation is common in translated texts;
- Many target texts simplify and disambiguate passages which are unclear in SL;
- A TT frequently normalizes wayward SL grammar and it standardizes other unconventional features of ST;
- Instances of repetition are either rephrased by the use of synonyms, or simply omitted;
- Translators frequently overuse typical TL features in an attempt to make the translated text sound more natural.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Chesterman, *Interpreting the meaning of translation*. Downloaded from: [www.linguistics.fi/julkaisut/SKY2006\\_1/1FK60.1.1.CHESTERMAN.pdf](http://www.linguistics.fi/julkaisut/SKY2006_1/1FK60.1.1.CHESTERMAN.pdf). 1.

Kai von Fintel and Lisa Matthewson, on the other hand, argue that very little attention has been paid to the study of semantic universals:

Common culture (what one might call “folk linguistics” or “folk anthropology”) frequently assumes that languages not only differ widely in their semantics but that these differences are correlated with deep differences in the “world view” of the speakers of different languages. Languages do look quite different from each other on the surface, which makes the leap from noticing that superficial variety to presupposing an *underlying* variety, even at the level of meanings, rather tempting.... Reinforcing the leap from superficial variety to presupposing underlying incommensurability may be a psychobiological tendency to assume that *other* people and cultures, since they are not like *us*, must be fundamentally different, not just superficially so. The denial of human universals, unsurprisingly, has a long intellectual history (von Fintel–Matthewson 2008: 141–142).

Lexical or semantic universals have been studied by Wierzbicka and others. Scholars have studied the issue of universals in semantics, by focusing on the lexicon of content morphemes (content morphemes are the predicates – nouns, verbs, and adjectives – that help language talk about the world).

There are several lists of proposed universally attested lexical items, for example:

- Swadesh lists, prepared not as claims for universal lexical status, but as reliable tools for wide-scale lexico-statistical and glotto-chronological investigations;

- from a textbook: *rustle, soil, [many animals], [many plants], [parts of the body], sleep, big, small, heavy, light, fast, slow, sick, talk, call, ask, believe, decide, birth, wave, up, down, hunger, life, death, danger, fear, want/will, power/authority, be allowed, be obliged, mother, man, woman, caress, high, deep, warm, cold, air, water, rain/snow, wind, sun, pain, pleasure, we, they, group, drink, shelter, make love;*

- the list of “semantic primes” proposed by Wierzbicka and other researchers working in the Natural Semantic Meta-Language (NSM) approach (von Fintel–Matthewson 2008: 149).

Perhaps the most careful studies of possible lexical universals have been conducted by Goddard (2001). Here is the (short) list of items that survived Goddard’s scrutiny: *man, woman, child, mother, head, eye, ear, nose, hand, day, kill, make, people, good, bad, big, small, think, know, want, see, hear, say, do, happen, live, die, here, above, below, inside, a long time* (von Fintel–Matthewson 2008: 151). Nevertheless, among the lexical items that Goddard (2001: 57) concludes as universal, there are quite a few functional morphemes (or ones that come close): *I, you, someone, something/thing, this, the same, one, two, all, much/many, there is, when/time, now, before, after, not, maybe, because, if, like, very* (von Fintel–Matthewson 2008: 160).

Of the 142 semantic universals listed in the Universals Archive at the Universität Konstanz (<http://typo.uni-konstanz.de/archive/intro/>), most are some kind of constraint on the lexicon.

“All languages contain terms for *white* and *black*, and there is an implicational hierarchy such that if a language possesses a term in the hierarchy, it also possesses all the other colour terms.

If a language has adjectives for shape, it has adjectives for color and size” (von Fintel–Matthewson 2008: 152).

Linguistic and semantic relativism and semantic universals are two conflicting points of view in relation to meaning. The universalist point of view, or the theory of semantic universals is based on the idea that languages share the same basic conceptual framework, i.e. there is something that is common in all languages. “It can be argued that there is a universal set of semantic categories (i.e. categories concerned with time, place, causation, animacy, etc.) from which each language draws its own subset of categories, and it is only in the choice from this subset, and in the permitted combinations in which they are expressed, that languages differ.”<sup>3</sup>

Diana Santos, in her *Semantics and machine translation*, argues that the concepts of meaning and translation are closely tied: “The translation between natural languages is generally acknowledged to have something to do with meaning.”<sup>4</sup> She talks about a so-called *semantics of translation*, implying the idea that there are some plausible criteria of adequate translation such as sameness of speech act, sameness of truth conditions, and sameness of derived truth conditions that are sometimes obeyed and some other times neglected in the process of translation – all these may be taken for translation and semantic-pragmatic universals.

All in all, we can see that translation universals and semantic universals differ, still some scholars (Santos, for instance) have tried to set up lists of items that can be considered universals in translation and in semantics as well.

Units of translation and lexical units are not exactly the same. Unit of translation refers to the linguistic level at which ST is recodified in TL. A unit of translation is the smallest unit of SL which has an equivalent in TL. The possible units of translation are phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, and sentences.

The wording at a given point in ST would determine the most appropriate unit of translation, which could be expected to vary in the course of a text or even a single sentence. Furthermore, it frequently happens that an ST unit is translated by a TL unit in a different size; for example, a word may be translated by a phrase and vice versa. If a translator uses larger translation units than is necessary to convey the basic meaning of ST, this

3 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)

4 Diana Santos, *Semantics and machine translation*. Downloaded from: [www.linguatca.pt/Diana/.../SantosAPL92.pdf](http://www.linguatca.pt/Diana/.../SantosAPL92.pdf). 1.

will lead to a free translation being produced; similarly, translating at a lower level than necessary will result in a literal translation. However, it seems likely that a translation between unrelated languages will usually involve larger units than if SL and TL are closely related (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 192).

Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), on the other hand, argue that *units of thought*, *lexicological units*, and *units of translation* are synonyms.

Nevertheless, translation is far more complex than simply trying to translate meanings. Translation is a multi-layered process which implies several steps, among them understanding, deconstructing, reconstructing, and recreating the text to be translated. Translators should be aware of the fact that the process of translation might give rise to a specific type of distribution of certain features (such as cohesive devices or lexical items) in translated texts vis-a-vis source texts and original texts in the target language. The presence of such unusual distributions of features may lead to the emergence of the *third-code*, *third language*, or *translationese* (a pejorative term referring to unnatural and comical TL usage, relying on an excessively literal approach to translation: inappropriate metaphors and syntax, unnatural word order, unnatural-sounding words), a phenomenon to be avoided by professional translators.

## The issue of translatable and non-translatable units of language

The words denoting *translate*, *translation* in Standard Average European (SAE) languages derive from roots in Latin and Classical Greek. The basic notion is that of carrying something across, from Latin *transferre* or Greek *metapherein*.

The semantic elements that are highlighted in this construal of the notion are (a) something (say 'X') remains the same, the something that is carried across; and (b) there are two contexts involved, which we can call the source and target contexts. X is thus transferred from source to target, across a border. This border is traditionally conceived of as a linguistic border, but it may also be defined differently. Definitions of 'X' also vary, but traditionally this is usually held to be the meaning, roughly speaking. Our average European construal thus stresses the preservation of identity, some notion of sameness or similarity, across a border of difference.... Consider now the situation with words denoting oral translation. In English, we have *interpreter*, *interpreting*, from Latin. The probable etymological root is 'between prices'. The origin comes from the concept of trade, where goods are exchanged. The interpreter stands between the prices, or values, and ensures that there is adequate equivalence—equal value.

This etymology thus stresses the mediating role of the interpreter.... The Hungarian word meaning ‘to translate’ is *fordítani*, whose literal meaning is ‘to turn something to the other side’. Like Finnish, this word seems thus to foreground the feature of difference, not similarity. The word for oral translation has different origins: *tolmácsolni*; an interpreter is a *tolmács*, from which German gets *Dolmetscher*. The etymology of these items may go back to the Hurrite language in Asia Minor, where *talima* seems to have meant a mediator, someone standing between. Here again we see that interpretation is conceptualized primarily in terms of mediation.<sup>5</sup>

What is the relationship between translation and semantics? This is the question that we are trying to answer in this chapter. To do so, we have to take a look at the issues of contrastiveness in linguistics.

Contrastive linguistics attempts to find out similarities and differences in both philogenetically related and non-related languages. Contrastive analysis can be carried out at three linguistic levels: phonology, grammar (morphology and syntax), and lexis (vocabulary). “Contrastive analysis is applied to reveal the features of sameness and difference in the lexical meaning and the semantic structure of correlated words in different languages. It is common knowledge that one of the major problems in the learning of the second language and in translation is the interference caused by the difference between the mother tongue of the learner and the target language” (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 237).

Each language contains words which cannot be translated directly from this language into another.

For example, some favourite examples of untranslatable German words are *gemütlich* (something like ‘easy-going’, ‘humbly pleasant’, ‘informal’) and *Schadenfreude* (‘pleasure over the fact that someone else has suffered a misfortune’). Traditional examples of untranslatable English words are *sophisticated* and *efficient*. This is not to say that the lack of word-for-word equivalents implies also the lack of what is denoted by these words. If this were true, we would have to conclude that speakers of English never indulge in *Schadenfreude* and that there are no sophisticated Germans or there is no efficient industry in any country outside England or the USA (Ginzburg et alii 1979: 238).

*Semantic voids* (also called *lacunes*, *blank spaces*, and *gaps*) refer to the situation in which for certain words from ST there are no corresponding words in TL. Basically, a void is the “non-existence in one language of a one-word equivalent for a designatory term found in another. Voids are found only at word level, as larger SL units may always be expressed in TL... through the use of rewording. Similarly, SL words which lack a TL equivalent may also be periphrastically glossed in TL” (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 196).

5 Andrew Chesterman, Interpreting the meaning of translation. Downloaded from: [www.linguistics.fi/julkaisut/SKY2006\\_1/1FK60.1.1.CHESTERMAN.pdf](http://www.linguistics.fi/julkaisut/SKY2006_1/1FK60.1.1.CHESTERMAN.pdf). 6–7.



There are four main types of semantic voids:

- Environmental voids (untranslatability of natural phenomena): e.g. *tundra*, *el Nino*;
- Cultural voids: religious and secular alike: e.g. *bar mitzvah*, *cream tea*, *samovar*;
- Lexical voids: there is no single TL word for referents that are present in the speech community: e.g. *Gemutlich* and *toska* (a kind of anguish, melancholy);
- Syntactical voids: TL has a suitable equivalent, but it can be used only if some syntactical rearrangements are made: e.g. *know-how*, or the Hungarian *barátnő* (lady friend).

Environmental voids are usually translated with the help of transcription. Cultural voids can be translated with transcription and glossing, i.e. the addition of explanatory footnotes. With lexical voids, translators can choose between using a one-word equivalent, paraphrase, or omission. What is called *semantic void* by semanticists is usually named *realia* or culture-based element in translation studies.

Not all languages are equivalent in expressive power. Another likely source of counter-examples to full translatability comes from *expressive meaning*. The problem of translatability may be discussed appropriately with reference to the notion of *cultural overlap*.

Cultures are not linguistically bound; in other words, languages and cultures are not coterminous. Linguistic boundaries do not coincide with cultural ones. There is always a certain degree of cultural overlap between two language communities. On the whole, similarities among languages are more important and more numerous than the differences among them. These differences can be explained in terms of cultural differences between the respective language communities.<sup>6</sup>

Lisa von Fintel et alii offer some examples in this respect.

Let us grab one such example from the cabinet of semantic curiosities. Burushaski, a language spoken in Pakistan, has two relational nouns to denote siblings, much like English *sister* and *brother*, except that the morpheme *cho* means “sibling of the same gender” (as the internal argument of the nominal) and *yas* means “sibling of the opposite gender” (from that of the internal argument).

So, a male speaker would call his brother *a-cho* “my same-sex sibling” and his sister *a-yas* “my opposite-sex sibling”, while a female speaker would use *a-cho* to refer to her sister and *a-yas* to her brother. Now, whether John calls Peter *my brother* or *my same-sex sibling* doesn’t seem to make a difference at the level of denotational semantics. But as soon as we consider situations where the sex of the speaker is uncertain, the two phrases give rise to different propositions.

6 [cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc](http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/idd/.../CURS%20ID%20SEMANTICA.doc)



As Yancey puts it: a Burushaski text in which the gender of the speaker has purposefully not been mentioned until the end, at which point the reader discovers that the speaker and her *a-cho* are both female, would not be readily translatable into languages which would force a gender specification.

In English, one could say *sibling*, but this would most likely tip off the reader to the surprise at the end (von Fintel–Matthewson 2008: 145).

Translatability is the opposite of untranslatability and it is used with reference to the extent to which words or phrases can be translated into another language. “Different languages do not mesh together, in that the unique configurations of grammar, vocabulary and metaphor which one finds in each language inevitably have some bearing on the types of meaning that can be comfortably expressed in that language” (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 180). Still, translation between languages occurs with a high degree of success, as the issues of translatability and untranslatability do not depend only on the linguistic units to be translated but also on the text-type, on the purpose of translation, and on the principles of translation that are followed. Scholars discuss untranslatability at the level of words and phrases, both grammatical and lexical meaning being involved.

Catford demonstrates that grammatically encoded SL meaning (such as the inbuilt femininity of French *elles* “they”) will almost inevitably fail to find a direct reflection in TL and will therefore be lost... Other writers discuss word-level lexical incompatibility, which can be caused either by differences between source and target cultural phenomena or by the simple non-existence of a TL word to label a given item or concept. However, it is generally agreed that this type of untranslatability occurs only on the level of single lexical items, and can be frequently circumvented by means of paraphrase or explicitation in such a way as to ensure that all the semantic features of ST are retained; furthermore, above the word level, other strategies such as compensation can also be employed. Yet, it is not enough to consider simple retention of the same basic semantic features as the sole criterion for translatability. The existence of further semantic dimensions which are added by such concepts as connotation and collocational meaning supports the conclusion that an absolute meaning does not exist independently of any particular language and that translatability can consequently only be a limited notion (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 180).

Gorea<sup>7</sup> offers a list with examples of untranslatable words:

*Bling* – English: slang for expensive and flashy jewellery, clothing, or other possessions or the flaunting of such possessions or the flashy lifestyle associated with it;

7 Lucia Gorea, *Lost in translation – Beyond words*. Downloaded from: <http://www.cttic.org/ACTI/2012/Actes/Lucia%20Gorea.pdf>. 8.

*Jayus* – Indonesian: someone who tells a joke so unfunny you cannot help laughing;

*Kamaki* – Greek: the young local guys strolling up and down beaches hunting for female tourists, literally “harpoons”;

*Hira Hira* – Japanese: the feeling you get when you walk into a dark and decrepit old house in the middle of the night;

*Layogenic* – Tagalog, Philippines: a person who is only good-looking from a distance;

*Dépaysement* – French: the feeling that comes from not being in one’s home country;

*Tingo* – Pascuense (Easter Island): the act of taking objects one desires from the house of a friend by gradually borrowing all of them;

*Torschlusspanik* – German; translated literally, this word means ‘gate-closing panic’, which, we add, has also led to the Hungarian *kapuzárási pánik* (which refers to midlife crisis);

*Scorpie* – Romanian: a mean and ugly woman.

## The semantic issues translators should be careful with

### Collocations

Translation students should be aware of the fact that borrowing is not only a way to enrich vocabulary (as presented in one of the chapters of this book) but it is also one of the seven translation procedures described in 1958 by Vinay and Darbelnet (Vinay, Jean-Paul–Darbelnet, Jean 1958, 1966 – *Stilistique comparée de l’anglais et du français*. Paris: Didier). Borrowing is, in their view, a type of direct translation in which elements of ST are replaced by parallel TL elements. As Shuttleworth and Cowie put it, borrowing is the simplest type of translation procedure...

... since it merely involves the transfer of an SL word into TT without it being modified in any way. The reason for this transfer is usually that the translator needs to overcome a lacuna, or – more significantly – wishes to create a particular stylistic effect, or to introduce some local colour into TT... Vinay & Darbelnet also point out that borrowings or loan words often enter a language after being introduced in a translation, and that many such words come to be so widely accepted in TL that they cease to be perceived as foreign items (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 17).

The semantic phenomena of collocation and semantic preference seem to be important in the process of translation. As Lauder puts it:

Collocation has been recognized for some time as something that translators need to be aware of. Collocations are of interest to translators not least

because of the challenge of finding target-language equivalents for collocate pairs. This is particularly apparent when we try to find equivalents for high-frequency, polysemous words. The different meanings of such words are revealed in the collocates they pair up with. For example, English *deliver* collocates with *letter*, *speech*, *news*, *blow*, *a verdict*, *baby*. The sense of *deliver* when collocated with *letter* refers to what postal workers do, dropping a letter into or through the letterbox; *deliver the news*, what newsreaders do on television, or perhaps a messenger; *deliver a verdict* suggests judges and courtrooms. Because the sense carried by *deliver* in each case is different, the word *deliver* will not have one equivalent in the target language but a different one for each sense. Such sense distinctions can be made clearer if we try to find a synonym for the word in each case. ... If you shed clothes, it means you take them off. If you shed blood, it means you spill it.<sup>8</sup>

The idea is not new; it has already been mentioned by Mona Baker, who states: “From a translator’s perspective, knowing the sets of significant collocates of words in different fields is necessary” (Baker 1992: 52).

In specialized translations, denotative meaning of terms (conceptual, lexical, or dictionary meaning) is of utmost importance. When the translator deals with several words belonging to the same synonymic series, choosing the right variant involves considering the context, text type, and collocability. Hence, in the case of the Hungarian *metszeni* (Romanian *a elaga*), if one fails to use the proper term *prune*, using another term from the synonymic series *cut*, *carve*, *engrave*, *gouge*, *slit*, *section*, *prune (down)*, and not the last one which means *removal of plant parts*, the meaning of the sentence will be completely altered. Cutting and pruning of an apple tree are definitely two very different things, and replacing one term with another changes the meaning of the whole text (Nagy 2014).

## False friends and idioms

Meaning is central in translation, and this becomes even clearer when facing false friends: when translating a sentence like *Volt egy kis afférja valakivel* into *She had an affair with someone*, the meaning of the TL sentence will not echo the meaning of the SL sentence. The same applies to the difference between the Hungarian word pairs like *papnő/papné*, *doktornő/doktorné*, which synonymic as they may seem, mean, in fact, completely different things (the first words of the couplets refer to professions, while the second words refer to the wife of the minister or of the doctor).

<sup>8</sup> Allan Lauder, *Collocation, semantic preference and translation: semantic preference as a reference source for translation*. Downloaded from: [english.um.edu.my/anuvaada/.../LAUDER.pdf](http://english.um.edu.my/anuvaada/.../LAUDER.pdf). 3.

Leon Levițchi (1970: 43–44) provides a long list of false friends, which may cause problems for unexperienced translators or language users: *abstract* (= *abstracție, abstracțiune, termen abstract, rezumat*), *actually* (= *într-adevăr, în mod real, realmente, actualmente*), *character* (= *caracter, reputație, recomandare scrisă, caracterizare, personaj, om original, excentric, calitate, caracter sau literă*), *civil* (= *civil civic, politicos, bine crescut*), *comfort* (= *confort, mângâiere, sprijin, liniște, odihnă*), *commodity* (= *articol de uz, marfă*), *confident* (= *convins, încrezător, încrezut*), *concert* (= *concert, înțelegere, acord*), etc.

Idioms pose as many problems in translation as false friends; in their case, replacement or substitution with cultural and functional TL equivalent is recommended:

*e.g. Szájába rág valamit – spoon-feeds someone;*

*Nagy port vert fel – made a scene;*

*Elment Földvárra deszkát árulni – went to sell coal in Newcastle;*

*Nem látja a fától az erdőt – cannot see the forest for the trees;*

*Orránál fogva vezet valakit – leads someone by the nose;*

*Lassan a testtel – take it easy;*

*Előre iszik a medve bőrere – counts his chicken before they are hatched* (Szöllősy 2007: 91).

## Polysemy, synonymy, and homonymy

The semantic issue of polysemy becomes important in the process of translation when translators come across instances of lexical ambiguity. In such cases, semantic disambiguation comes to the fore as a vital stage in the process of translation.

Because of the polysemy commonly displayed by the words in any language and the strong dependence of meaning upon precise context, even the simplest text will inevitably include an element of lexical ambiguity. ... While such polysemic elements are automatically and effortlessly disambiguated by a native speaker on the basis of an intuitive understanding of their precise meanings in the given context, for the non-native translator they present a frequent source of difficulty. ... The concept of semantic disambiguation is particularly important in the field of translator training, as one of the jobs of the trainer is to encourage students to look at the context in which a word is used rather than relying on an automatic association of one particular SL word with one particular TL meaning or accepting without question the TL equivalents suggested by bilingual dictionaries (Shuttleworth–Cowie 2007: 63).

Problems may arise in the case of synonymic series. For instance, an important aspect of medical English is the use of synonyms: whereas more largely

used terms like *remedy* or *medical history taking* can have synonyms (*medicine, cure, treatment* in the case of *remedy* or *anamnesis* in the case of *medical history taking*), the majority of the more specialized terms (especially noun phrases) do not have synonyms, which leads to the use of *this/that/these/those* or *which* or to the repetition of the same word in one sentence: “Another aspect of the use of synonyms is when they use the English variant alongside with the Latin version, such as *uterine tube* or *fallopian tube* and *tuba uterina Fallopii* (Lat. *Tuba* = trumpet or *in toto/overall, completely* such as in *This concept is difficult to accept in toto*” (Nagy 2013: 179–189). Some disease names convey negative connotations: *leprosy* is today being replaced by *Hansen’s disease*.

Medical English poses other semantic problems as well, for instance, *false friends* (Engl. *dramatically* – Rom. *dramatic*; Engl. *murmur* – Rom. *murmur*; Engl. *insult* – Rom. *insultă*, etc.), polysemantic words (*switch, cleft, marker, management*), and English doublets (synonymous variants) for already existing words in Romanian (Engl. *rash*/Rom. *erupție*; Engl. *pacemaker*/Rom. *stimulator cardiac*) (Frînculescu 2009: 5–6).

English–Hungarian synonymic doublets warn translators to handle them with care: *score* – *pontszám*, *up-to-date* – *naprakész*, *staging* – *stádiummeghatározás*, *compliance* – *együttműködés*, *study* – *tanulmány*, *marker* – *jelölő*, *graft* – *átültetett szövet*, *bypass surgery* – *kerülőműtét*. In many Hungarian medical texts, authors tend to use the English version instead of the perfectly respectable Hungarian term. The reason for using the English terms or the combined English–Hungarian terms instead of full Hungarian translations are numerous: among these, we mention: the willingness to use short terms (English words and expressions may be shorter indeed), the English words being more accurate (less connotative, as denotation, lack of metaphorical or connotative aspects is essential in ESP), but also professional snobbishness might play a certain role in this (Nagy 2013: 179–189). When translating English texts into Hungarian or Romanian, it is advisable to use the vernacular scientific terminology as much as possible.

One of the most common translation mistakes that can occur with horticultural texts is mixing popular terms with scientific ones: it is not allowed to use terms like *gané* instead of *szervestrágya* when translating the English term *organic manure* into Hungarian. Another major problem with horticultural texts is related to the translation and/or handling of names of genera, families, and other taxa (see Nagy 2014: 145–157).

In the field of translation, synonyms have produced quite a lot of surprises in other types of texts as well. Szöllősy (2007: 69) mentions the surprising request of not translating *Duna* into *Danube*, as the Danube cannot be the same river as Duna since the two names are not identical. She offers, in this respect, some valuable pieces of advice, such as considering the context while translating, as “words receive their final meaning only within a context” (Szöllősy 2007: 69). In a book dedicated to the translation of non-fictional texts,

Judy Szöllősy highlights the assertive nature of translation, hinting at the fact that when translating one works with meaning and sense first of all. Meaning has four aspects: sense, feeling, tone, and intention, which are all manifest *in and through the choice of words* (Szöllősy 2007: 34). The practical advice she gives students is to discover, first and foremost, the sense behind the text, and then proceed to translating it. For instance, the Hungarian expression *Az anyád* and the English expression *Your mother* are dictionary equivalents, but not always contextual equivalents (translating the Hungarian curse as *Your mother* will not sound as some outrageous swearing). Personal names and proper names do not have meaning apart from the person or thing they refer to. For instance, *Lánchíd* and *Chain Bridge*, *Budai Vár* and the *Castle District* refer to the same thing, they have the same referent; therefore, they are safely interchangeable in translation. “The synonymy of two linguistic forms consists in their interchangeability in all contexts without change of true value” (Szöllősy 2007: 70).

Leviţchi (1970: 91) states that “the importance of a good command of synonymy not only in one but also in two or more languages is a prerequisite for translations. ... To translate means to find equivalents – the most adequate equivalents, both ideographic and stylistic; and since the best solutions seldom come *at once*, to find equivalents actually means to select from a possible synonymic series”.

In the same way, homonyms, especially puns or phrases used for humorous effects, may be problematic for translators. “Homonymic series in an English text are generally a stumbling-block for translators, for in most cases there is no semantic correspondence between the English homonyms and their translation(s); so that translators are often obliged to resort to other types of puns” (Leviţchi 1970: 101). What is essential, as was with metaphors, is that puns should be translated with puns.

## Proper nouns and social deictic elements

Proper names and diminutives pose a number of problems in translation. We do not really translate the name, rather the title, and we may change the order of words.

When translating names, keep the conventions of the host language in mind.... A further consideration in handling names is the obvious fact that the sense of a name may be important to the narrative. So, when faced with descriptive names, of which Zsigmond Móricz was a grand master (as was Charles Dickens), make an attempt to translate them. The cast of characters in *Úri muri*, for instance, include *Vasgyúró* (i.e. hard as nails, of prodigious strength), *Fancsali* (i.e. glum, sour), *Kacsabegy* (i.e. duck pouch, gullet), *Barkács* (i.e. carpenter, fiddler, handyman, man of all trades). If these names

remain untranslated, much of the fun and social criticism of the original Hungarian text will also remain unavailable... on the other hand, do not translate descriptive names if they will convey false information, such as the name Zsiga Borbély, from the same novel, because Zsiga happens to be a chemist, and not a barber (Szöllősy 2007: 87–88).

When translating sentences, one should always beware of meaning and content, rather than form:

e.g. *Rozoga állapot miatt olcsón jutottam a házhoz.*

*Being in a dilapidated condition, I was able to buy the house cheap* (Szöllősy 2007: 71).

Misplaced modifiers change the meaning of the translated sentence completely.

As Hungarian tends to be more wordy, Szöllősy recommends to omit from translations the following types of expressions, especially when they do not add anything to the sense: *a lehetőségekhez mérten, arról már nem is beszélve hogy, áttekintést nyújt, azt gondolom hogy, úgy gondolom hogy, egyfajta, ennek tanúsága szerint, ki kell emelni, meg kell mondanom, meg kell említeni, mindenesetre, mint ahogy arról már szó esett, nevezetesen, sokszínű, többek között, annak vonatkozásában, annak tekintetében, úgymond*, etc. “Certain words and expressions are what we called understood in English, i.e. they become redundant if included in your translation. So don’t translate them, scrap them. Here is what I mean: *true professionals, really reliable*, I chose the *entirely traditional one, Today it seems uncertain that*” (Szöllősy 2007: 80).

The *Tu* and *vous* pronouns, the so-called *magázás-tegezés* in Hungarian, may be interesting in translation.

*Magázás*, the form of address between individuals who are not on close terms or are not on an equal footing or in the same age-group (the French equivalent is the use of *vous*) but which is just a jot more confidential than the use of *Ön* – a highly respectful and courteous form of address between individuals unacquainted with each other – should cause no special problem in English translation, since the neutral pronoun *you* provides a fine substitute. However, if you need to indicate formality involved in the act of *magázás*, you can resort to the use of formal address, thus: *Mr. Jones, Mrs. Jones, Sir, Mr., President, Lieutenant*. Though come to think of it, the use of *maga* when cursing someone, as in *Maga hatökör!* which with its clash of the high and the low can be a source of humour... would surely lose something in the translation. It can, however, be replaced by something else, as long as it suits the situation, like: *You know, Mr Jones, you’re a donkey’s ass!* (Szöllősy 2007: 82–83)

The bulk of forms of address and titles used in the Hungarian language, especially up to the Second World War...



...to govern social correspondence between people of different social standing is a source of wonder and delight... The Hungarian language was admirably inventive in this regard. Here are just a few of many forms of address used in the olden days: *kegyelmes úr*; *kegyelmes asszony*, *őexcellenciája*, *nagysága*, *őnagysága*, *nagyságos asszony*, *méltóságos úr*; *nagyságos úr*; *kegyed*, *kiskegyed*, *úrhölgy*, *úrasszony*, *úrnő*... On the other hand, English society had many similar distinctions of its own. So, instead of translating honorific titles, substitute them with their English equivalents or near equivalents (Szöllősy 2007: 91).

e.g. *kegyelmes úr* = *your excellency*, *méltóságos úr* = *your grace*, *nagyságos úr* = *your honour*, *nagyságos asszony* = *your ladyship*, *tekintetes úr* = *your lordship*.

Care is needed when translating institution names: in this case, substitution with functional equivalents is recommended: *Apeh* = Apeh, the Hungarian internal revenue service, *BKV* = BKV, the Budapest Transportation Authority, *anyakönyvi hivatal* – Register's Office (following the UK model) or Office of Documents (following the US model).

Actual translations can tell us a lot about semantics.

Translation is impossible because meanings and interpretations are not like soft and pliant substances extractable from one expression in one language and mouldable without loss or modification into another expression in another language. Languages, on the contrary, are discrete structures, and meanings are entwined in the structures themselves. Therefore, during translation, things crack and snap, things disappear, and things are added, and there is hardly ever a unique correct solution to a translational task. Instead, actual translations provide a host of alternative approximations to the unattainable ideal, and this is a potential source of information: semantic insights may emerge from the way the sets of alternatives are structured.

Semantic studies always depend on paraphrases, or alternative ways of saying the same thing; translations provide such alternatives from a theoretically untainted source.<sup>9</sup>

Helge Dyvik tries to elucidate what a study of meanings may teach us about translation, in exploring the potential of translations to provide semantic insights:

After all, meanings appear to be far more elusive phenomena than translations: we generally feel that we know more or less what translations are, while answers tend to get much vaguer when we are asked what meanings are, or how we should distinguish them. The latter questions require theory-bound reflection, while translation is a practical task.

Translations come about when translators, usually with no theoretical concern in mind, evaluate the interpretational possibilities of linguistic

9 Helge Dyvik, *Translations as a semantic knowledge source*. Downloaded from: <http://folk.uib.no/hfohd/TransHLLT.pdf>. 28.



expressions in specific contexts, within texts with specific purposes, and then try to recreate the same interpretational possibilities in a target text serving a comparable purpose in another language. This is a normal and common kind of linguistic activity in multilingual societies – an activity which provides an empirical basis for talking about a *translational relation* between languages.<sup>10</sup>

Analyses of semantic fields by means of features have also been used in a translational context; one example can be found in an article by one of the pioneers of translation theory, Eugene A. Nida (1958):

Here the perspective is that of the translator faced with heavily culture-specific semantic fields of which he has scant knowledge. Hence the question is the traditional one about what a study of meanings may teach us about translation, rather than the reverse. The task is to find translational correspondences between a variety of terms for ‘shaman’ in two Mayan languages. The method, called ‘Componential Plotting’, was to make a table with the terms along one axis, and all the different functions of a shaman – healing sick, casting spells, etc. – along the other. Then informants were asked what they would call a person performing each function, and the correspondences between terms and functions were plotted in the table. This is a nice example of an empirical semantic investigation, applied mono-lingually, leading to the assignment of semantic features (denoting shaman functions) to a set of words across two languages. A network of translational correspondences between terms in each language could then be established on the basis of shared features.<sup>11</sup>

While presenting the specific features of a linguistic research method, called *The Semantic Mirrors method*, Dyvik comes up with the idea that each language may be the *semantic mirror* of the other, in an intricate network of translational correspondences uniting the vocabularies of the two languages.

This network allows us to treat each language as the ‘semantic mirror’ of the other, based on the following assumptions:

- (1) Semantically closely related words tend to have strongly overlapping sets of translations.
- (2) Words with wide meanings tend to have a higher number of translations than words with narrow meanings.
- (3) If a word *a* is a hyponym of a word *b* (such as *tasty* of *good*, for example), then the possible translations of *a* will probably be a subset of the possible translations of *b*.
- (4) Contrastive ambiguity, i.e., ambiguity between two unrelated senses

10 Helge Dyvik, *Translations as a semantic knowledge source*. Downloaded from: <http://folk.uib.no/hfohd/TransIHLT.pdf>. 27.

11 Helge Dyvik, *Translations as a semantic knowledge source*. Downloaded from: <http://folk.uib.no/hfohd/TransIHLT.pdf>. 28.

of a word, such as the two senses of the English noun *band* ('orchestra' and 'piece of tape'), tends to be a historically accidental and idiosyncratic property of individual words. Hence we don't expect to find instances of the same contrastive ambiguity replicated by other words in the language or by words in other languages. (More precisely, we should talk about ambiguous *phonological/graphic* words here, since such ambiguity is normally analysed as homonymy and hence as involving two lemmas.)

Words with unrelated meanings will not share translations into another language, except in cases where the shared (graphic/phonological) word is contrastively ambiguous between the two unrelated meanings. By assumption (4), there should then be at most one such shared word.<sup>12</sup>

James Hurford asks himself the question whether perfect translation between languages is ever possible. The answer he finds is the following:

In point of fact, many linguists disagree about this and it is likely that absolutely perfect translation of the same proposition from one language to another is impossible. However, to simplify matters, here we shall assume that in some, possibly very few, cases, perfect translation IS possible. ...We shall see that we have to be very careful, when talking about meaning, to make it clear whether we are dealing with utterances or sentences (Hurford et alii 2007: 23).

However, we must add that despite these *possibly very few cases of perfect translation* reality shows us that very good, if not perfect, translation IS possible in everyday translation practice, perhaps fostered by some knowledge of semantics as well.

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12 Helge Dyvik, *Translations as a semantic knowledge source*. Downloaded from: <http://folk.uib.no/hfohd/TransIHLT.pdf>. 31–32.



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## REZUMAT

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### **Introducere în semantica lexicală pentru studenții de la traductologie**

Volumul intitulat *Introducere în semantica lexicală pentru studenții de la traductologie* își propune să familiarizeze studenții de la specializarea traductologie cu rolul și locul semanticii în lingvistica contemporană, totodată cu rolul și funcția semanticii în limba engleză. Am urmărit să includem în volumul nostru cele mai importante teme din domeniul semanticii (precum semn și semnificare, referent, competență lingvistică și competență semantică etc.). Pornim de la premisa că semantica înseamnă deopotrivă știința sensurilor (pentru vorbitorii de limbă străină) dar și descrierea sensurilor (pentru lingviști). Am abordat aspecte legate de istoria semanticii, definirea semanticii și definirea sensului. Am inclus în manualul nostru cel puțin trei direcții de abordare a sensului (analiza trăsăturilor semantice, roluri semantice și schimbări semantice). Am făcut o incursiune în domeniul relațiilor paradigmatică (sinonimia, antonimia, hiponimia, omonimia, polisemia) și a relațiilor sintagmatică (colocații și prototipuri semantice). Ne-am referit la principalele modalități de schimbare semantică (împrumutul, formarea de cuvinte și schimbările de sens). Am abordat și principalele taxonomii legate de tipurile de sens și am prezentat și diferitele nivele ale sensului (nivelul fonematic, morfematic, sensul la nivelul cuvântului și respectiv sensul la nivelul propozițiilor). Am inclus și un capitol dedicat importanței studierii acestor noțiuni de semantică din perspectiva unui (viitor) traducător.

Obiectivul nostru în elaborarea și conceperea acestui manual a fost să conștientizăm studenții în legătură cu aspecte legate de folosirea limbii în relație cu multiplele fațete ale experienței umane, dorind, în ultimă instanță să-i facem să înțeleagă relația dintre cunoștințe și experiență.





# KIVONAT

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## **Bevezetés a jelentésstanba fordító szakos hallgatók számára**

A *Bevezetés a jelentésstanba fordító szakos hallgatók számára* című jegyzetünk megírásának célja az volt, hogy rávilágítsunk a szemantika helyére és szerepére a nyelvészet tágabb kérdéskörében. A fordító szakos diákjaink számára szeretnénk érthetővé és elérhetővé tenni olyan kérdéseket és fogalmakat, mint a jelentés(tan) alakulása, elméletei, változásai, szintjei, típusai stb.

Könyvünkben külön fejezetben tárgyaljuk a szemantika szerepét a fordítás-tudományban. A legfontosabb szemantikai fogalmakon kívül a tudományág legújabb vetületeit is szeretnénk diákjaink elé tárni. Célunk az, hogy megértessük hallgatóinkkal a nyelvhasználat és az emberi lét más vetületei közt létező nagyon árnyalt kapcsolatrendszert. Nem utolsósorban, könyvünk megírása által azt szeretnénk elérni, hogy a hallgatóink megértsék és tudatosítsák azt az összetett kapcsolatrendszert, amely a (nyelv)tudás és a tapasztalat, azaz a nyelv használata között létezik.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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