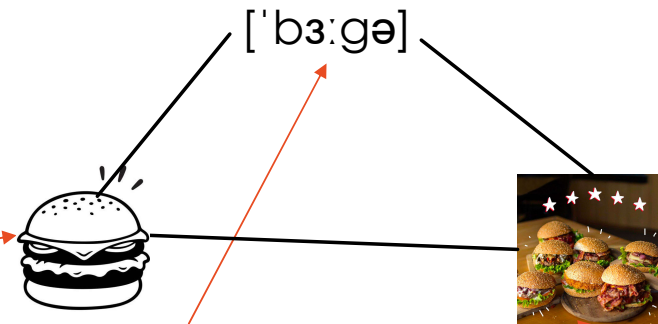


Semantics



- It studies the structure of meaning
- Meaning = relation between a linguistic expression (**signifier**) and a mental category (**signified**) that helps classifying objects/concepts (**referent**)
- The set of potential referents a word can have is called **denotation** (e.g. burger). Associations between a word and a concept related to world knowledge instead of semantic relation are called **connotations** (e.g. 'blue' in the sentence "I'm blue" is not referred to the colour – denotation – but it's negatively connotated and associated to sadness)
- Any linguistic element which requires a specific context to be associated with a referent is a deictic – i.e., pointing devices that point to objects inserted in a situational context (e.g. which are the deictic elements in the sentence "Can you pass me the bag over there?")

Compositional meaning

- It's the meaning that sentences, clauses and phrases (but also polymorphemic words) have, consisting of the combination of different concepts expressed by the constituents
- Sentences have a semantic meaning (compositional, deriving from the meaning of each constituent) and a pragmatic meaning (deriving from its communicative purpose)

Meaning organization and relation

- Meaning is organized in our mind as mental lexicon that allows us to speak and understand a language;
- Different words are organized in networks known as lexical fields;
- Relations among words within the mental lexicon can be:
 1. **Hyper(o)nymy/hyponymy: Hypernym** = word whose meaning is superordinate to another (e.g. 'social media' is hypernym of 'Instagram'); **hyponym** = a word whose meaning is subordinate to another in the sense that a hyponym is one of the possible forms of a hypernym (e.g. 'Instagram' is hyponym of 'social media', i.e., Instagram is a kind of social media); **co-hyponym** = two or more words that share the same hypernym (e.g. 'Instagram' and 'Tik Tok' are co-hyponym of the hypernym 'social media'). Hypernymy and hyponymy are sense relations = semantic relation between words that share important aspects of their meaning;
 2. **Opposites = complementaries** if there are no possible in-between words (e.g. alive vs dead), **antonyms** if there's a scale of possibilities between two extremes (e.g. hot and cold). Antonyms are gradable (e.g. very hot, extremely cold, hotter, the coldest, etc.), complementaries are not (e.g. *very alive, extremely dead). **Converses** are opposites involved in the same context and one implies necessarily the existence of the other (e.g. buy vs sell = If someone buys something it means that somebody else must have sold it). Converses can be used interchangeably to express the same situation (e.g. I bought a pair of gloves at H&M. = H&M sold me a pair of gloves);
 3. **Polysemy** = one lexeme has more than one meaning (e.g. READ means both the act of reading something and studying a subject at university. Ex. I read gossip every day vs I read English at Sapienza University of Rome)
 4. **Homonymy** = two different lexemes but identical form, either phonologically or orthographically (e.g. the colour 'red' and the past simple/participle 'read')
 5. **Synonymy** = two different lexemes with the same meaning but different form (e.g. shy and timid)

Meaning in context: Corpora

- Big collections of electronic data (machine-readable texts) to be analysed through specific software
- Corpora are used to create dictionaries, e.g. OED
- British English = BNC (British National Corpus) – ca. 100,000,000 words
- American English = COCA (Corpus Of Contemporary American) – ca. 1,000,000,000 words
- Helsinki Corpus (CoRD) = Diachronic corpus of English - 1,572,800 words at the moment

Pragmatics

- Communicative intensions = what do speakers want to achieve by using a language? Which linguistic forms do they use?
- John L. Austin (1955, published 1962 *How to Do Things with Words*) and Searle (1975, 1979): **Speech Act Theory – speech acts** = linguistic actions that speakers perform with certain communicative intensions. Basic units of interaction. They are 3: 1) **Locution** (the mere form that the act has; what is actually said by the speaker S), 2) **Illocution** (the speaker's communicative intension; what is meant), 3) **Perlocution** (the effect produced on the hearer H or addressee)
- In pragmatics, sentences are called **utterances** = realisations of a speaker's communicative intensions. So, utterances do not always correspond to sentences (e.g. in the dialogue: "I want to break up with up" "What?!", 'what' is not a sentence, but it's an utterance). More than one utterances together make a **discourse**

Discovering pragmatic meaning

- Inference: process to discover the pragmatic meaning of an utterance
- Inferences are possible thanks to:
 1. **Interpersonal** knowledge: S and H know each other
 2. **Situational** knowledge: S and H share the situational context of the utterance
 3. **World** knowledge: S and H know things about the world in general for past experiences
 4. **Co-textual** knowledge: S and H know what they've said before the utterance under scrutiny

Background
knowledge

Felicity conditions for speech acts

- Conditions to make speech acts effective (Searle)
 1. **General** condition: the hearer needs to understand its meaning
 2. **Propositional content** condition: the semantic content has to be rendered clearly
 3. **Preparatory** condition: pre-requisites. What does the hearer need to know to understand the speech act?
 4. **Sincerity** condition: does the speaker want to carry out the act sincerely?
 5. **Essential** condition: both speaker and hearer must understand a speech act as it is (illocution and perlocution need to coincide)

Have a go with pragmatics: Meaning and felicity conditions



SIMON: Where is it?

MICHAELA: What are you talking about?

SIMON: One of you took my laptop. Give it back.

CONNOR: Ooh, this is good.

SIMON: This isn't funny!

ASHER: Unwad your panties, bro.

SIMON: I went to the bathroom. It was right there. I came back, and it was gone, and I will call security if I have to.

MICHAELA: I dare you.

ASHER: Ain't afraid of no Po-po.

SIMON: Okay, open your bag then and prove you don't have it.

MICHAELA: It is illegal to do an unlawful search and seizure of someone's belongings.

SIMON: This isn't funny. That computer was expensive and I don't have money to blow like the rest of your spoiled asses.

MICHAELA: Spoiled?

SIMON: Oh, you think we don't know that you're just here playing at law school until you can swap a rich daddy for a rich husband?

MICHAELA: Go anywhere near my bag or anyone else's in this room and your laptop won't be all you're missing, you spineless, tiny-balled, whiny excuse of a man! Walk away.

(How to Get Away with Murder, s03e05)