LESSON FOUR IN LINGUISTICS

Part One

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(to group **1 . 2 . 3 . 4 . 5 & 6**)

Semantics

Introduction

The study of grammar revealed more than ever the importance of meaning and its close relationship with syntax. The development of our previous lesson Pointed to the immediate constituent analysis shortcomings mainly its neglect of meaning & meaning relations (eg: **ambiguous & synonymous sentences**).This laid preliminary insights demanding a much deeper study of meaning .

In the last half of the 20th Century rising scholars Voices called for "lexico grammar"(G.L. Lakoff , I.Mc Cawley , J.R.Ross , C.Fillmore , Katz and Fodor…) , a realization that vocabulary & grammar are inseparable. The same view was clearly expressed by Chomsky that meaning and grammatical analysis are two sides of The same coin. More views forced a reappraisal of how language is characterized by an abstract rule governed behavior which reflects the speaker's Competence (his intuitive Command of the Language he speaks and understands) , put clearly what kind of knowledge the speaker possesses to distinguish between ambiguous /anomalous Sentences and paraphrases and more as in :

I phoned an old friend .

(old = of long standing) (old = aged)

Chomsky's Sentence : Colourless green ideas sleep furiously =grammatical but incoherent (semantically anomalous).

Such developments changed the Course of The study of Semantics from being mostly centered around Vocabulary types of semantic relationships in the past to focusing more on words relationships within phrases and sentences (J.Ornstein , C.W Hayes & W.W Gage (1964) P 99)

Today semantics includes :

1- <u>Lexical semantics</u>

2- <u>Compositional semantics</u>

3- <u>Pragmatics</u>

A- Semantics

The study of Linguistic meaning is Called Semantics it describes the relationship between symbol (morpheme & word) and meaning. It is taken from the Greek word Semeion meaning sign.

  A Great number of Linguists, admitted that the study of semantics is one of the most Complex and elusive tasks. Meaning proved ambiguous and Controversial term (C.K Ogden & I.A Richards (1923) & J.Lyons (1977)).But the Systematic description of this aspect of Language reduced the difficulty Very greatly beginning with :

1- Lexical Semantics

It deals with the meanings of morphemes & words and the meaning relationships among words.

Words are Semantically related to one another in various ways. They are not only constrainers (fulfilling roles , their grammatical meaning) they also have relations (lexical meaning , generally conventional words that users of a language share). They are :

a - SYNONYMY = Morphemes and words have synonymous relationships .Two or more words may Share or have very close meaning. Sameness of meaning makes them equivalent or intersubstitutable.

eg : (rich = Wealthy) (thrifty= frugal) (powerful = influential)
(provide = Supply) (mesmerize = Fascinate)
(spiteful = malicious)
(Honest = frank = open = straight = direct = candid = blunt)

Sources of synonyms abundance in languages : historical + modern contacts involving trade , occupation (invasions & wars) , religion , geographical neighbouring , tourism , Internet ...etc

Semanticists demonstrated that no two synonyms have the Same meaning , they differ at least in 5 ways :

1- Dialect
-(Jail-Prison) (Understand- Comprehend) (Buy- purchase)
(rich -wealthy)

2- Style
- (eschew - avoid) (Peruse -read) (cobbler - shoe repairer)
(pristine - primitive)
-Go away, bunk off, run, get lost, buzz off , scram , vamoose
(in our language : fly !)
- gentleman , bloke , fellow, man , guy, chap , lad..etc

3 - Emotive and Evaluative meaning
Words have denotative (pure) meanings but they can change with Time or in context . They can take Extra meanings : connotative meanings . Euphemism is a reproduction of accepted terms

eg :
backward - developing
Toilet - Washing room .

primitive- pristine
miser / stingy - ungenerous
intercourse - exchange (commercial)

4 - Colloquial Restriction

A set of colloquial rules restricts the use of some words (they fit with some but not with all)

eg :
Animals cries = neigh (horse) - bray (camel)- roar (tiger)- crow (cock) - howl (wolf) - chirp-warble (birds) - croak (frog) ...etc

- Rancid (Butter & bacon) - addled (eggs and brains) - mouldy (bread cheese) - rotten (vegetables fruit) - sour (milk and yoghurt) - putrid (Fish & meat)- fusty (semolina, Couscous) also musty for rooms.

Languages differ in the collocational ranges of their words for example : polish (shoe) , wipe (nose) , brush (teeth) are precise but meet with clean . German has only one term for all putzen (Graddol 1987, p 101)
Think of walk = paddle , tread , trip , plod , waddle , swagger , trample , lag ...etc

5 - Meanings that overlap very loosely

eg : Examine - test - evaluate - mark - categorize -divide - separate => (Examine ... separate)
-Teach - guide - show - explain - clarify - justify => (teach... justify) => they are not close fitting.

b - Antonymy : When words have opposite meanings they are called antonyms (opposites) . We learned earlier that there are no perfect synonyms , conversely antonyms can be defined fairly precisely . they are distinguished in terms of three criteria :

1- Gradation

Antonyms follow norms of gradations . some opposites are relatively gradable **eg** :

-(hot - cold) - (short - long) -(small - big) - (fast -slow)- (cheap- expensive) ...etc

Gradability involves intermediate terms (hot - warm - tepid - cool - cold) . It can be expressed explicitly or implicitly by the use of comparative more, most , least OR er , est & with adding very (very hot) extremely (extremely hot) , damned (damned hot) , sizzling (sizzling hot) .

The meaning of adjectives in gradable pairs is relative : it depends on the element it modifies eg : no matter how big the size of a mouse it does not exceed a very small rabbit .

2- Unmarkedness

antonyms abound in Pairs where one is marked and the other is unmarked eg : (old-young) - (big - small) - (high - low) - (wide - narrow)

=> old - high - wide & big are unmarked . They are used to ask questions of degree and they appear in the answer :

How old is he ? ⟹ he is 18 years old .

How high is the mountain ? ⟹ It is 300 feet high .

in English small terms suggest markedness and call for further questions :

- How old is he ? ⟹ he is too Young
- How young is he ? ⟹ still a tiny baby

Contrastively , in Japanese the marked term is used to form a question and it appears in the answer eg :
(deep - shallow) , (old - young) ...etc
How young is he ? ⇒ 30 years Young
How shallow is the well ? ⇒ 3 meters shallow

3 - Complementarity

Some opposites are incompatible . they do not allow gradability : (left - right)- (dead- alive) - (internal- external)
(democratic - dictatorial)
An additional type of antonyms are called relational opposites or converses eg : teacher / pupil _ give / receive_ employer / employee _ buy / sell _ import / export _ husband / wife _borrow / lend …
Other antonyms take prefixes **eg** :
Likely / unlikely _ patient / impatient _ decent / indecent _ able / unable _conformist / nonconformist … (Fromkin V2003)

C- Polysemy and Homonymy

When dealing with these types of semantic relationships confusion abounds . why ?
Polysemy :
Polysemy = It relates to the plurality of meanings of a lexical item . When a lexical item has several meanings We say it is polysemic or polysemous.
Polysemy is an area which proved very troublesome in lexical semantics. Lexicographers (dictionary makers) find it very difficult to decide whether to treat a word as polysemous or homonymous **eg** :
in oxford dictionary 2006 : Bank and pupil are polysemous words :

- bank is given one dictionary entry.
- Pupil (the same). But can is treated as a homonymous term and is given two different entries can 1 and Can 2

Homonymy :
Two or more separate words with Separate meanings happen to have the same form. This raised the question of homophony and homography.
-Homophony (identical pronunciation , different meaning and different Spelling) **eg** : cite, sight , site / right write rite
-Homography = identical spelling , different meanings identical & it could be different pronunciation **as in :**
fast , mole, spell , wind
-fast =one dictionary entry = fast is polysemous .
-mole= one dictionary entry = mole is polysemous .
-Spell= one dictionary entry= spell is polysemous
-lead / Lid / verb & lead / Led / noun are homographs not homophones they are treated as homonyms with two different dictionary entries: lead1 - lead 2
Wind /wind/Noun & Wind /waind/ are treated as homonyms (homographs but not homophones) with different dictionary entries : Wind1 & Wind2
==>So, lexicographers decided to give one dictionary entry for polysemic terms and many entries for homonymous terms. Their decision is based on etymology: deriving from one origin = related historically + related conceptually
(relatedness of meaning) ==> they are polysemous . If not , they are homonymous.
⇒ Views based on historical etymology are crisscrossed. The decision remains a source of theoretical debate in Linguistics.

⬆ Please, check up how these words are treated in other dictionaries and find out for yourselves .
Use a dictionary and make sure you know the meanings of the words i used .

Thank you!

d - Hyponymy

Hyponymy shows best semantic relationships . It involves inclusion : the meaning of one form is included in the meaning of another (detailed description in Saussure's hierarchical relationships and semantic fields . Also in Eugene Nida's set of contrasts specifying the features of semantic field to be developed in part 2)

eg :
Tulip ==> flower ==> plant
knife ==> cutlery =>> utensils
mother ==> family ==> kinship relations :
superordinate term = kinship relations
- immediate hyponym = family
- hyponyms = grandfather, grandmother , uncle aunt , mother, father ...
- Co - hyponyms = mother and father distinguished by the feature of sex = female and male parent .
Distinctive features of kinship terms include sex generation lineality …

TO BE CONTINUED IN PART 2 , THE NEXT AND LAST PDF