

SEMANTICS

Semantics: The Study of Meaning

- ❖ Semantics is the branch of linguistics that studies **meaning in language**.
- ❖ It focuses on how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning.

Referential Meaning

- ❖ Referential meaning is the **objective, literal meaning** of a word.
- ❖ It refers to what the word denotes **in the real world**.
- ❖ Dictionaries describe this meaning using the **essential components** of a word.
- ❖ Example: A dog is defined as "*an animal with four legs and a tail, often kept as a pet or trained for work.*"

Associative Meaning

- ❖ Associative meaning (or emotive meaning) includes the **subjective emotional connections** a word creates.
- ❖ These associations differ by **individual** and **culture**.
- ❖ Words like *loyalty* or *fear* evoke emotional responses beyond their definitions.

Reference

- ❖ Reference is the connection between a linguistic expression and a **real-world object**.
- ❖ It points to the **actual entity** being spoken about.
- ❖ Reference is **extralinguistic** (outside language).
- ❖ Example: "Where is your car?" refers to an identifiable object in the world.

Sense

- ❖ Sense refers to the **semantic relationships between words** within the language system.
- ❖ It is **intralinguistic** (inside language).
- ❖ Example: *bachelorette* and *spinster* are related in sense because both refer to unmarried women, but they carry different implications.

Denotation vs. Connotation

Denotation

- ❖ The literal dictionary meaning of a word.
- ❖ Example: *cow* – a herbivorous animal that provides milk.

Connotation

- ❖ The emotional or figurative meaning a word suggests.
- ❖ *He works like a cow* – positive.
- ❖ *He eats like a cow* – negative.

Types of Semantics

There are **two main types of semantics**:

1. Lexical Semantics

- ❖ Deals with the meanings of **individual words**.
- ❖ Example: *Sinister* (originally Latin: “left-hand side”).

2. Compositional Semantics

- ❖ Deals with meanings of **phrases and sentences**, based on how words combine.
- ❖ **Example:**
 - Idiom: *to bury the hatchet* → “to make peace”.
 - Literal usage: *Buried was the bloody hatchet* (from *The Song of Hiawatha*, 1855).

Word vs. Lexeme

Word

- ❖ A word is a **referential unit**, a basic container of meaning.
- ❖ Examples: *machine, love, mother tongue*.

Lexeme

- ❖ A lexeme is a **minimal unit that carries a single meaning**, regardless of how many words it has.
- ❖ Examples:
 - *die* – one-word verb.
 - *pass away* – two-word phrasal verb.
 - *kick the bucket* – three-word idiom.

Lexeme as an Abstract Unit

- ❖ A lexeme includes **all grammatical forms** of a word.
- ❖ Example: the lexeme *die* includes:
 - *dies*
 - *died*
 - *dying*

Semantic Features

- ❖ Semantic features are the **smallest units of meaning** that make up the sense of a word.
- ❖ They help identify what characteristics define a word.
- ❖ Example: *woman* has the features **+human, +adult, +female**.

Componential Analysis

- ❖ Componential analysis breaks down the meaning of words into **binary features** (+ or -).
- ❖ This method clarifies similarities and differences between related words.

Example: Human Categories

Word	Human	Adult	Female
Boy	+	-	-
Girl	+	-	+
Man	+	+	-
Woman	+	+	+

Example: Horse-related Terms

Word	Equine	Adult	Female
Colt	+	-	-
Filly	+	-	+
Stallion	+	+	-
Mare	+	+	+

Semantic Roles (Thematic or Case Roles)

Semantic roles describe the **function** of noun phrases in events or actions.

Agent

- ❖ The participant who **performs the action**.
- ❖ Example: *the cat* in "The cat chased the rat."

Theme

- ❖ The participant that is **affected by the action**.
- ❖ Example: *the rat* in "The cat chased the rat."

Instrument

- ❖ The entity **used by the agent** to perform an action.
- ❖ Example: *pencil* in "The girl drew a picture with a pencil."

Experiencer

- ❖ The person who experiences a **feeling, perception, or state**, but does not perform an action.

- ❖ Example: *The captain felt sad.*
- ❖ Example: *We heard a noise.*

Location

- ❖ The **place** where an entity is found.
- ❖ Example: *in the garden* in “They saw a snake in the garden.”

Source

- ❖ The point **from which** something moves.
- ❖ Example: *from Sam* in “We borrowed the money from Sam.”

Goal

- ❖ The point **to which** something moves.
- ❖ Example: *to the library* in “They returned the books to the library.”

Lexical Relations / Sense Relations

- ❖ These describe how the **meanings of different words relate** to each other.
- ❖ Examples include pairs like **tasty / delicious** and **kind / cruel**.

Synonymy

- ❖ The study of **sameness of meaning**.
- ❖ Words may share meaning but are not always interchangeable.

Examples:

- ❖ *buy / purchase*
- ❖ *postpone* (neutral/informal) vs. *procrastinate* (formal)

Close Synonyms

Words with **similar but not identical** meanings:

- ❖ almost / nearly
- ❖ cab / taxi
- ❖ big / large
- ❖ handbag / purse
- ❖ couch / sofa
- ❖ sweat / perspire