8 Semantics*

Semantics

a. Meaning

- The cognitive meaning (vs. stylistic meaning, speech act meaning, emotive meaning) of words and sentences

- Identifying word meaning
  - referential theory: the meaning of a lexeme = what it refers to
  - conceptual theory: the meaning of a lexeme = “the sum of the most essential features [semantic features] of the concept associated with the lexeme”

- Identifying sentence meaning
  - “the set of conditions that are necessary and sufficient for the sentence to be true” → truth conditions

- So, the cognitive meaning
  - of a sentence = proposition of a sentence: “a state of affairs described by a sentence, which can be true of false”
  - of a word = sense of a word: “the contribution that the word (lexeme) systematically makes to the cognitive meaning of sentences” (Varga 2010)

b. Sense relations between words

- synónymy (sýnonyms, synónymous)

- ambiguity
  - homónymy (hómonoys, homónymous)
  - polýsemy (pólýsémous)

• antónymy/oppositeness (ántonym, antómymous)
  o complementary opposites
  o gradable opposites
  o relational opposites


• hypónymy/logical inclusion (hýponyms, hypónymous)

- What are suffix and prefix the hyponyms of?

c. The cognitive meaning of sentences depends on

• the cognitive meaning of the sentential constituents
  (1) He sold his house.
  (2) He burned his house.
  (3) He burned a house.

• the functions of the constituents
  (4) I shot the sheriff.
  (5) The sheriff shot me.

• the structure
  (6) They fired ((lazy men) and (women)).
  (7) They fired (lazy (men and women)).

d. Proposition relations between sentences

• synonymy → paraphrases
  o based on lexical synonymy
    (8) The woman was talking with the man.
    (9) The lady was having a conversation with the gentleman.
  o the same cognitive meaning expressed by different structures
    (10) The best mathematicians solved this problem.
    (11) This problem was solved by the best mathematicians.
• ambiguity
  o lexical reasons
    (12) I had a little lamb.
  o structural reasons
    (13) I shot the man with a gun.
  o a particular constituent having different functions
    (14) I like his photos.

➢ The following sentences may be lexically or structurally ambiguous or both. Provide paraphrases showing that you comprehend all the meanings.
  - I said I would finish it on Thursday.
  - Wanted: Man to take care of cow that does not smoke or drink.
  - We decided on the boat.
  - Headline: FARMER BILL DIES IN HOUSE
  - Is he really that kind?
  - You should see her shop.
  - I saw him walking by the bank.

• incompatibility
  (15) John is smart.
  (16) John is stupid.

• entailment
  (17) I have a guinea pig.
  (18) I have a pet.