Semantics
Week 3
The Scope of Semantics
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A. Naming

Language might be thought of as a communication system with on the one hand “the signifier”, and on the other “the signified”.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signifier</th>
<th>Signified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a word</td>
<td>the object in the world that it stands for/ refers to/ denotes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problems with this view:

- Words, then, are ‘names’ or ‘labels’ for things.
- It seems to apply only to nouns; therefore, it seems impossible to extend the theory of naming to include the other parts of speech.
- adjectives: beautiful, handsome, difficult, etc
- verbs: run, think, swim, etc
- others: prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns
Abstract Nouns

e.g. love, hate, inspiration, nonsense

That is to say:

- Words are not just names of things
- Words are not simply names of the objects of our experience.

Even where there are identifiable physical objects, the meaning is not necessarily the same as its denotation.
e.g. The evening star and the morning star
They both denote the same object, the planet Venus. The meaning ???

Also, words often seem to denote a whole set of rather different objects.

e.g. Chairs
Other things to consider:

✈ Experience

❖ objects cannot be clearly grouped and labelled by a single word.

❖ Sometimes no precise equivalents in other languages.

✈ Culture

The words of a language often reflect not so much the reality of the world, but the interests of the people who speak it.
V Scientific vs Common knowledge
e.g. tomato vs apple?

One possible way working out the problem:
Some words actually denote objects
‡ That children learn some of them as labels.
The reminder are used in some way derived from the more basic use.
Bertrand Russell:

Learned ostensibly, by pointing at objects

To be defined in terms of the object words.

Discussed so far ≠ words.

Sentence ???

We cannot directly relate the meaning of a sentence to things and events in the world.
B. Concept

Relates words and things directly?
♦ Relates them through the mediation of concepts of the mind.

Ferdinand de Saussure ♦ ‘sign’ theory
Richards and Ogden ♦ ‘semiotic triangle’
Symbol:
the linguistic element, e.g. word, sentence, etc

Referent:
the object, in the world of experience

Thought or Reference:
concept
What is de Saussure’s ‘associative bond’ and the Ogden and Richards’ link between symbol and concept?

- psychological one

  our ability and practice of associating one with the other, remembering that chair refers to the concept of ‘chair’.

- some kind of permanent association stored in the mind or in the brain
C. Sense and Reference

Reference:
The way speakers and hearers use an expression successfully.

Sense:
The sense of an expression is its place in a system of semantic relationships with other expressions in the language.
Sameness of meaning
I almost fell over.
nearly

Intuitive Concept
John walked. An hour elapsed.
John elapsed. An hour walked.
V  Referring Expressions, Predicates, and Universe of Discourse

Referring Expressions:
any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or someone (or a clearly delimited collection of things and people), i.e. used with a particular referent in mind.
an apple ≠ may and may not be referring expression
Predicator of a simple declarative sentence is the word (sometimes a group of words) which does not belong to any of the referring expressions and which, of the remainder, makes the most specific contribution to the meaning of the sentence.

Predicate is any word (or sequence of words) which (in a given single sense) can function as the predicator of a sentence.
Generic Sentence :
A sentence in which some statement is made about a whole unrestricted class of individuals, as opposed to any particular individual.

Universe of Discourse :
Any utterance as the particular world, real or imaginary (or part real, part imaginary), that the speaker assumes he is talking about at the time.
V  Deixis and Definiteness

A deictic word:
a word which takes some element of its meaning from the context or situation (i.e. the speaker, the addressee, the time and the place) of the utterance in which it is used.

e.g. two years ago, here, this, that
Definiteness:
A feature of a noun phrase selected by a speaker to convey his assumption that the hearer will be able to identify the referent of the noun phrase, usually because it is the only thing of its kind in the context of the utterance, or because it is unique in the universe of discourse.
D. Kinds of Meaning

Semantics is concerned with:
- factual information
- propositions

Language is not only to provide information, inform hearers or readers of ‘facts’ that they do not already know.

A great deal of our meaning is not ‘ideational’ at all, but is ‘inter-personal’ or ‘social’, relating ourselves to others.
What do we do with a language?

- We do not merely make statement.
  question, imperatives
- Speech acts, e.g. influencing, warning.
- A variety of social relations.
  polite - less polite - impolite
  social language : greeting
- We need not ‘mean what we say’
E. The Word as a Semantic Unit

Not all words seem to have the same kind of meaning.

full words - form words
form words ≠ grammatical meaning

It is not all clear that the word is a clearly defined unit.
morpheme ?? lexeme ??

Transparent and Opaque Words
e.g. chopper, doorman vs axe, porter
Many words in English are called ‘Phonaesthetic’.

e.g. -ump refers to some kind of rounding mass ‡ plump, chump, rump, hump, stump

not to be generalised

Semantic division seems to ‘override’ word division.

e.g. heavy smoker, good singer, artificial florist, criminal lawyer