The Non Linguistic Context

Semantics week 7
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A. The Exclusion of Context

Context should be excluded from semantics in that:

- it would be difficult in practice as well as theory to handle context
- including context, e.g. world of experience (i.e. the sophisticated collection of human knowledge) will result in an infinite scope of the study
The meaning of a sentence can be known and understood in isolation from any context.

Meanwhile, let’s consider the following examples:

*The bill is large.*

*He needs the chair.*

“I haven’t had my breakfast”

“My baby needs milk”

*For other useful examples, refer to p. 45-6*
Any kind of NON-LINGUISTIC information *may* be used in the analysis and understanding of a sentence.

It is a mistake to think that we can limit it to what is ‘purely’ linguistic.

B. Context of Situation

B. Malinowski

- study on language in the Trobriand Islands, the South Pacific
found that language not only is “a mirror of reflected thought” but also can be “a mode of action”

child uses words as “active forces” 
man uses them as “important utensils”

J.R. Firth

see context of situation as part of the linguist’s apparatus in the same way as are the grammatical categories that he uses

thus, regard it as one of techniques of description
It is just one of the ways in which a linguist handles a language

Is it still applicable for the study of semantics?

C. Behaviourism

Bloomfield

define meaning as the situation

the ideas of $S \not\in r \ldots s \not\in R$
D. Linguistic Relativity

Part of the difficulty in relating language to the external world may arise from the fact that the way in which we see the world is to some degree dependent on the language we use.

Learning about the world and learning about language are activities that cannot be separated. Thus, the world is partly determined by our language.
Sapir’s and Whorf’s Hypothesis
Hopi, American Indian language
† all events of brief duration are represented by verbs.
‡ In another American Indian language, no noun/verb distinction. As a result, for an expression such as ‘There is a house’, it is expressed as ‘A house occurs’ or ‘It houses’
‡ Bahasa Indonesia?
‡ Javanese?