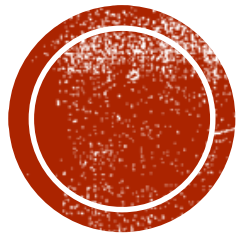


- **Context as meaning**
- **Collocation**
- **Idioms & Proverbs**
- **Meaning of word, sentence, utterance and proposition**
- **Difference between sentence meaning and utterance meaning**
- **Difference between sense, extension, reference and denotation**

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CONTEXT AS MEANING

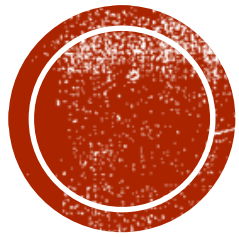


The origins of **LINGUISTIC CONTEXT** lie in the view that linguistic analysis is largely concerned with the **DISTRIBUTION** of linguistic elements, a view associated most closely with the name of **Zellig Harris**. The notion of distribution was important to the so-called '**structuralist**' school of linguistics that was at its height in the 1950s.

On meaning, Harris commented, '**It may be presumed that any two morphemes having different meanings also differ in their distribution.**' This is, perhaps, true enough, but we should usually argue that the difference in distribution was a result of the difference in meaning - **dog** is unlikely to occur in the same linguistic contexts as **apple**. But some linguists have suggested that the meaning of a word or morpheme is determined by the environment in which it occurs and that, for instance, two words can be considered synonymous if and only if they are totally interchangeable in all environments.

CONTEXT AS MEANING

M. Joos, indeed, specifically suggests that the linguist's meaning of a unit is 'the set of conditional probabilities' and he leaves 'outside' or 'practical' meaning to the sociologist.



The view of linguistic context deals with meaning in terms of relations between words, but this time with what we might call **SYNTAGMATIC** (as opposed to **PARADIGMATIC**) relations. By syntagmatic is meant the relationship that a linguistic element has with other elements in the stretch of language in which it occurs, while by paradigmatic is meant the relationship it has with elements with which it may be replaced or **SUBSTITUTED**. Thus if we consider **The cat is on the mat** we could talk of a syntagmatic relation between **cat** and **mat**, but if we compare this with **The dog is on the mat** we have a paradigmatic relation between **cat** and **dog**.

CONTEXT AS MEANING

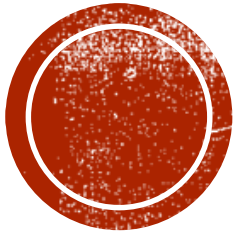
The attempt to state meaning in terms of distribution is not satisfactory, why?

First, it does not deal with what is usually meant by meaning; in this respect it is even less satisfactory than the sense relations.

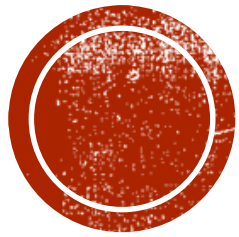
Secondly, it is difficult to see how such an approach could do more than indicate sameness and difference of meaning.

Thirdly, sameness and difference of meaning are not related to sameness and difference of distribution, for, in particular, antonyms, words with opposite meanings, will usually be found with almost identical distribution - both **wide** and **narrow**, for instance, with **road**, **band**, etc.

Fourthly, and most importantly, it is surely obvious that to define meaning in terms of distribution is very largely to put the cart before the horse. Words have different distribution **BECAUSE** they have different meanings.



COLLOCATION



A much less extreme view is that of Firth who argued that '**You shall know a word by the company it keeps**'. For Firth this keeping company, which he called **COLLOCATION**, was merely **PART** of the meaning of a word. As we have seen, meaning was also to be found in the context of situation and all the other levels of analysis as well. Moreover, he was concerned not with total distribution, but with the more obvious and more interesting co-occurrences, the '**mutual expectancy of words**'.

The study of linguistic context is of interest to semantics for two reasons.

First, by looking at the linguistic contexts of words we can often distinguish between different meanings. Nida, for instance, discussed the use of chair in:

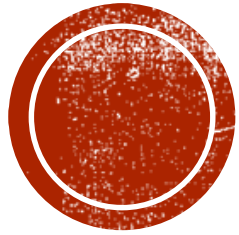
COLLOCATION

- (1) sat in a chair
- (2) the baby's high chair
- (3) the chair of philosophy
- (4) has accepted a University chair
- (5) the chairman of the meeting
- (6) will chair the meeting
- (7) the electric chair
- (8) condemned to the chair

Secondly, although in general the distribution of words may seem to be determined by their meaning (rather than vice versa) in some cases, this is not entirely true. We have that **rancid** occurs with **bacon** and **butter**, and **addled** with **brains** and **eggs**, in spite of the fact that English has the terms **rotten** and **bad** and that **milk** is never **rancid** but only **sour**. There have been some extensive investigations of collocation within texts and the results suggest that the co-occurrences are determined both by the meaning of the individual words and (though to a much lesser extent) by conventions about '**the company they keep**'.

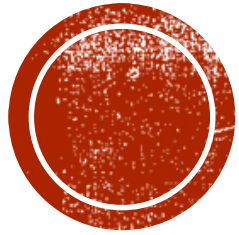


COLLOCATION



It has been argued that **ALL** collocations are determined by the meaning of the words, though this point of view seems rather **perverse**. Thus it might be said that **pretty** means **handsome** in a **female** (or **feminine**) way, and that for this reason we can say a **pretty child** to mean **a pretty girl** and not '**a handsome boy**'. This is a little implausible and it is even less plausible to say that **rancid** means **rotten** in **a butter-like** or **bacon-like** way or that **addled** means **rotten** in the way that **brains** or **eggs** can be. These collocations are merely indicating that there are the words to refer to rottenness when used with butter and eggs. The same point is even more obvious with the collective words. There is no meaning distinction between **herd** and **flock**, except that one is used with **cows** and the other with **sheep**.

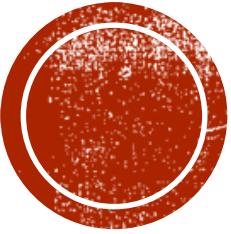
COLLOCATION



In fact, there are words often collocate with a number of other words that have something in common semantically. We find that individual words or sequences of words will **NoT** collocate with certain groups of words. Thus, though we may say **The rhododendron died**, we shall not say **The rhododendron passed away**, in spite of the fact that **pass away** seems to mean 'die'. It is not very plausible to say that pass away indicates a special kind of dying that is not characteristic of shrubs. It is rather that there is a restriction on its use with a group of words that are semantically related. The restrictions are, a matter of **RANGE**.

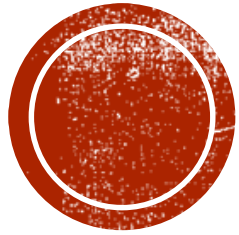
COLLOCATION

We can, perhaps, see **three** kinds of **collocational restriction**.



First, some are based wholly on the meaning of the item as in the unlikely *green cow*. **Secondly**, some are based on **range** – a **word** may be used with a whole set of words that have some semantic features in common. This accounts for the unlikeliness of **The rhododendron passed away** and equally of **the pretty boy**. **Thirdly**, some restrictions are collocational in the strictest sense, involving neither meaning nor range, as **addled** with **eggs** and **brains**.

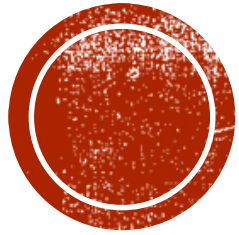
IDIOMS



Idioms involve collocation of a special kind. Consider, for instance, **kick the bucket, fly off the handle, spill the beans, red herring**. For here we not only have the collocation of kick and the bucket, but also the fact that the meaning of the resultant combination is opaque - it is not related to the meaning of the individual words, but is sometimes nearer to the meaning of a single word (thus **kick the bucket** equals **die**).

Idiom functions to some degree as a normal sequence of grammatical words. But there are a great number of **grammatical restrictions**. A large number of idioms contain a **verb** and a **noun**, but although the **verb** may be placed in the **past tense**, the number of the **noun** can never be changed. We have **spilled the beans**, but not ***spill the bean**. Similarly, with **red herring** the **noun** may be **plural**, but the **adjective** cannot be **comparative** (the **-er form**). Thus we find **red herrings** but not ***redder herring**.

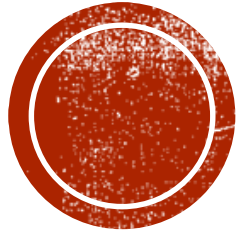
IDIOMS



There are also plenty of **syntactic restrictions**. Some idioms have **passives**, but others do not. **The beans have been spilled** is all right but ***The bucket was kicked** is not. The restrictions vary from idiom to idiom. Some are more restricted or **'frozen'** than others.

A very common type of idiom in English is what is usually called the **'phrasal verb'**, the **combination of verb plus adverb** of the kind **make up, give in, put down**. The meaning of these combinations cannot be predicted from the individual verb and adverb and in many cases there is a single verb with the same or a very close **meaning—****invent, yield, quell**. There are even degrees of **idiomaticity** since one can make up a story, make up a fire or make up one's face. Moreover, it is not only sequences of verb plus adverb that may be idiomatic. There are also sequences of **verb plus preposition**, such as **look after**, and sequences of **verb, adverb and preposition**, such as **put up with** ('tolerate').

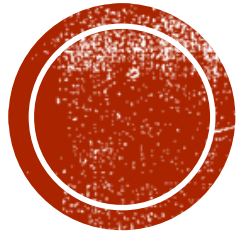
IDIOMS



There are also **partial** idioms, where one of the words has its usual meaning, the other has a meaning that is peculiar to the particular sequence. Thus **red hair** refers to **hair**, but not hair that is red in strict colour terms. We also find partial idiomaticity in **raining cats and dogs**.

PROVERBS

Proverbs are traditional sayings or phrases. They often give practical advice and are based on the shared human experience. They are short, brief statement that usually offers wisdom, or a truth. They can offer a shortcut for explaining or conveying information as well.



Proverbs can be translated from other languages and cultures, and often use metaphorical or formulaic language. For example:

Actions speak louder than words.

Actions don't literally speak louder than words, as they can't talk. It means that **“what you do is more important than what you say.”**

Proverbs come from a variety of sources, including philosophers such as Confucius and Plato; and from stories, songs, movies, literature, and more. Many sayings by Jesus and Shakespeare have become proverbs but weren't considered such when they were first created.

PROVERBS

Characteristics of Proverbs

Proverbs share common characteristics. They are:

1. Short and simple

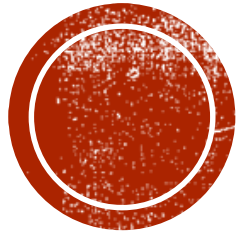
A long and mazy sentence cannot be a proverb because proverbs must be concise.

2. Easy to remember

For a proverb to spread far and wide, it has to be memorable and easy to remember.

3. Timeless

Proverbs must stand the test of time. They should be relevant and useful in modern times, even if they were coined several years ago.



PROVERBS

Common Proverbs (and What They Mean)

1. **All that glitters is not gold.**

Meaning: Something that appears valuable or true may not be.

2. **A picture is worth a thousand words.**

Meaning: Artwork or images can convey meanings that go beyond verbal description.

3. **Blood is thicker than water.**

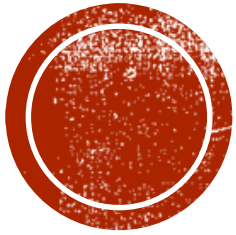
Meaning: Relationships between family members are the strongest of all.

4. **A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.**

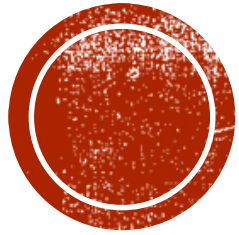
Meaning: What you already have in hand is better than what you might get.

5. **An apple a day keeps the doctor away.**

Meaning: If you eat healthily, you will be healthy.



WORD MEANING

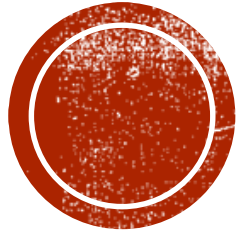


Knowing a language, especially one's native language, involves knowing thousands of words. As mentioned earlier, we can call the mental store of these words a **lexicon**, making an overt parallel with the lists of words and meanings published as dictionaries.

The word does not carry the description with it. This can be seen from the trivial fact that words which we do not know do not have any meaning to us. What a word in fact carries with it when it is spoken and heard is its sound form (or its spelling, if it is written).

When saying a word, we produce a certain sound pattern. The recognition of this sound pattern by the hearer is possible if it is stored in the hearer's mind. The meaning of the word must be residing in his mind too.

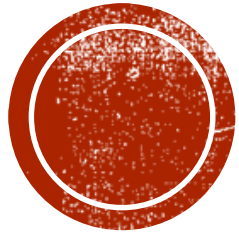
WORD MEANING



It must be information directly linked to the sound pattern of the word. The meaning is therefore a **mental description**. For mental descriptions in general, the term **concept** will be used. A concept for a kind, or category, of entities is information in the mind that allows us to discriminate entities of that kind from entities of other kinds.

The meaning of a word, more precisely a content word (noun, verb, adjective), is a concept that provides a mental description of a certain kind of entity.

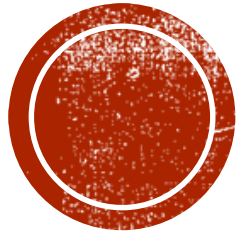
SENTENCE MEANING



Applying the forms and meanings of all words as well as one's knowledge of grammar to the linguistic input, one will be able to compose the meaning of the whole sentence. The result is one complex concept which combines all the elements of the sentence. Let us call this a concept for a kind of situation. Thus, **the meaning of a sentence is a concept that provides a mental description of a certain kind of situation.**

The meanings of sentences cannot be listed in a lexicon like the meanings of words: they must be created by rules of combination. Semanticists often describe this by saying that sentence meaning is **compositional**. This term means that the meaning of an expression is determined by the meaning of its component parts and the way in which they are combined.

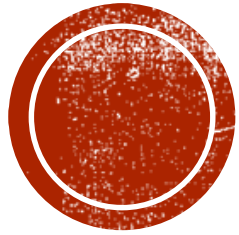
UTTERANCE MEANING



Utterance meaning comes about when a sentence with its meaning is actually used in a concrete context. First of all, utterance meaning involves reference. In addition to, and in connection with, reference another central notion comes into play, the notion of truth. If someone says a sentence in a particular scenario, the sentence is true but in a slightly different scenario it might be false. As long as a sentence is not used with concrete reference, it fails to be true or false.

Utterance meaning can be defined as the meaning that results from using an expression in a given CoU. Utterance meaning derives from expression meaning on the basis of the details provided by the CoU. The only aspects of the CoU that matter are those that immediately affect reference and truth of the expression.

PROPOSITION MEANING

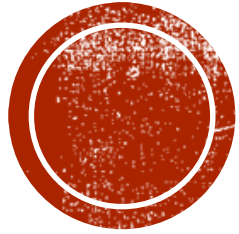


The notion for what a sentence as a whole refers to in a given context is called **situation referred to**. It can be defined as the set of the referents of all referring elements of the sentence and how they are linked. This notion only makes sense if the sentence is true. By analogy with the notion of **potential referents** we can talk of the **situations potentially referred to**. These are all those situations that fit the mental description provided by the meaning of the sentence, i.e. all the situations for which the sentence is true. In accordance with common terminology, **the descriptive meaning of a sentence** is called its '**proposition**'. Alternatively, the proposition of a sentence will be referred to as the '**situation expressed**', or the '**situation described**'. The descriptive meaning of a sentence can now be defined as shown in the definition below:

The descriptive meaning of a sentence, *its proposition*, is a concept that provides a mental description of the kind of situations it potentially refers to.

PROPOSITION MEANING

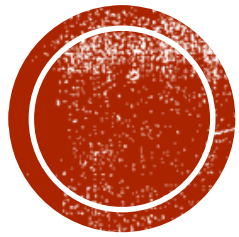
To sum up, the descriptive meaning of a sentence (*its proposition*) is a concept for a certain kind of situation.



Some linguists employ this notion of proposition in their semantic analysis, often to identify a description of an event or situation which might be a shared element in different sentences. So, for example, the statement *Joan made the sorbet*, the question *Did Joan make the sorbet?* and the command: *Joan, make the sorbet!* might be seen to share a propositional element: **JOAN MAKE THE SORBET**. In this view, these different sentences allow the speaker to do different things with the same proposition: to assert it as a past event; to question it; or to request someone to bring it about.

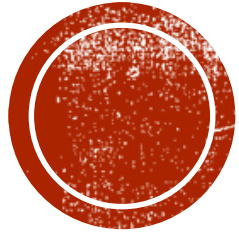
Propositions are descriptions of states of affairs and which some writers see as a basic element of sentence meaning.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SENTENCE MEANING AND UTTERANCE MEANING



These two terms are used to describe different levels of language. The most concrete is utterance: **an utterance** is created by speaking (or writing) a piece of language. If I say **Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny**, this is one utterance. If another person in the same room also says **Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny**, then we would be dealing with two utterances. **Sentences**, on the other hand, are abstract grammatical elements obtained from utterances. Sentences are abstract because if a third and fourth person in the room also say **Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny** with the same intonation, we will want to say that we have met four utterances of the same sentence. In other words, ***sentences are abstracted, or generalized, from actual language use.***

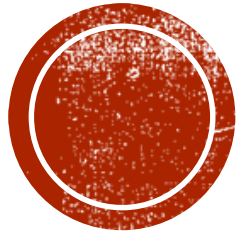
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SENTENCE MEANING AND UTTERANCE MEANING



We can look at sentences from the point of view of the speaker, where they are abstract elements to be made real by uttering them; or from the hearer's point of view, where they are abstract elements reached by filtering out certain kinds of information from utterances.

To sum up: **utterances** are real pieces of speech. By filtering out certain types of (especially phonetic) information we can get to abstract grammatical elements, **sentences**.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SENSE, EXTENSION, REFERENCE AND DENOTATION

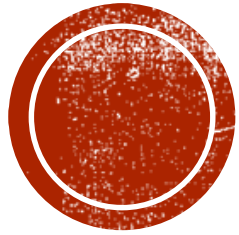


The relationship by which language hooks onto the world is usually called **reference**. The semantic links between elements within the vocabulary system is an aspect of their **sense**, or meaning.

Ferdinand de Saussure's well-known examples include a comparison of English **sheep** and French **mouton**. In some cases they can be used to refer in a similar way, but their meaning differs because they are in different systems and therefore have different ranges: in English there is an extra term **mutton**, used for meat, while the French word can be used for both the **animal** and the **meat**. Thus, the meaning of a word derives both from what it can be used to refer to and from the way its semantic scope is defined by related words. So the meaning of **chair** in English is partly defined by the existence of other words like **stool**.

Reference deals with the relationship between the linguistic elements, words, sentences, etc., and the non-linguistic world of experience. **Sense** relates to the complex system of relationships that hold between the linguistic elements themselves (mostly the words); it is concerned only with intra-linguistic relations.

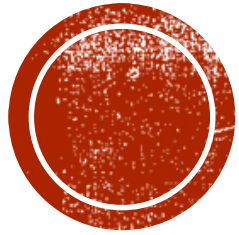
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SENSE, EXTENSION, REFERENCE AND DENOTATION



We have **two kinds of semantics**, one that deals with **semantic structure** and the other that deals with **meaning in terms of our experience outside language**. It is enough to see that there may be two kinds of semantics, one that **relates to non-linguistic entities**, and one that **is intra-linguistic**.

In semantics the action of picking out or identifying with words is often called **referring** or **denoting**. Some writers, like **John Lyons**, separate the terms **refer** and **denote**. For these writers **denote** is used for the relationship between a linguistic expression and the world, while **refer** is used for the action of a speaker in picking out entities in the world. We will adopt this usage, so that if I say **A sparrow flew into the room**, I am using the two noun phrases **a sparrow** and **the room** to refer to **things in the world**, while the nouns **sparrow** and **room** denote **certain classes of items**. In other words, **referring** is what speakers do, while **denoting** is a property of words.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SENSE, EXTENSION, REFERENCE AND DENOTATION



Another difference which follows from these definitions is that **denotation** is a stable relationship in a language which is not dependent on any one use of a word. **Reference**, on the other hand is a moment-by-moment relationship: what entity somebody refers to by using the word sparrow depends on the context.

We can make useful distinctions among the things referred to by expressions. We use the term **referent** of an expression for the thing picked out by uttering the expression in a particular context; so ***the referent of the capital of Nigeria would be, since 1991, the city of Abuja.*** Similarly, the **referent** of a **toad** in ***I've just stepped on a toad*** would be the unfortunate animal on the bottom of my shoe. The term **extension** of an expression is the set of things which could possibly be the referent of that expression. So the **extension** of the word **toad** is the set of all toads. In the terminology of Lyons (1977), the relationship between an expression and its extension is called **denotation**.

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