

College of Education for Humanities
Department of English

Lecture One (Chapter 9)

Defining Semantic - Types of Meaning

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Academic Year 2026

This chapter explores the field of semantics.

differentiates between referential and associative/emotive and introduces three approaches to the study of semantic

1. Semantics features,
2. Semantic roles (agent, patient/theme, instrument, experiencer, location, source and goal),
3. Lexical relations (synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, homonymy, polysemy and metonymy) and prototypes.

Semantics

-The study of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences.

-It focuses on what the words conventionally mean rather than on what an individual speaker might think they mean, or want them to mean,

-on a particular occasion.

This approach is concerned with linguistic meaning that is shared by all competent users of the language.

Meaning

What do we mean by meaning?

Meaning is a multifaceted phenomenon.

First, language communicates information about the world around us: we can refer to people, places, concrete objects, and abstract ideas (e.g., Queen Elizabeth, Alaska, bicycles, and love)

Second, meanings are things that are stored in the minds of the speakers and hearers who use language.

Linguistic meaning does not exist independently outside the minds that process language. Therefore, meaning is also a cognitive and psychological phenomenon.

There are two types of meaning:

When we investigate the meaning of words in a language, we are normally interested in the conceptual meaning rather than the associative meaning of the words.

Conceptual/ referential meaning/ denotative meaning

-This type of meaning covers the basic, essential components of meaning that are conveyed by the literal use of words.

-It is the meaning that you could find in dictionaries.

e.g. the word (needle) might include “thin, sharp, steel instrument”.

Associative/emotive meaning/connotative meaning

-An idea or feeling that is attached to a word whenever a person encounters it. However, these associations may differ from one person to another.

e.g. the word (needle) can be associated with (pain, illness, blood, drugs... etc.).

Q/ What are the types of meaning? Show the difference between them.

Conceptual meaning:

- **Needle** = thin, sharp, steel, instrument
- **Low-calorie** = producing a small amount of heat or energy

Associative meaning:

- **Needle** = pain, illness, blood, drugs, thread, knitting, hard to find.
- **Low calorie** = healthy
- Associative connotations related to a word.
- These associations differ from a person to another.

Oddness in Language

Sometimes, we encounter sentences that are syntactically correct, but semantically weird. Consider these examples:

- The hamburger ate the boy
- The table listens to the radio
- The horse is reading the newspaper

These sentences are syntactically valid, following the basic rules of sentence formation. However, their oddness arises from their semantics. We must investigate the components of referential meaning to understand this oddness.

In the first example,

"The hamburger ate the boy"

The referential meaning of "hamburger" differs significantly from that of "boy." The noun "boy" denotes an animate being capable of eating, while "hamburger" lacks this property. Hence, the sentence is semantically odd.

A sentence such as "The table listens to the radio" seems odd. Yet it follows syntactic rules perfectly.

This is because it doesn't follow semantic rules.

A noun that can be the subject of the verb "listens" must be able to hear.