

WHAT IS SEMANTICS?

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Abstract: *Language is the primary source of communication for humans and is used to convey thoughts, feelings, intentions, and desires to others. Knowing a language means to be informed how to make and understand sentences with particular meanings. Semantics is a study of the meaning of lexical items and other parts of language. It is the branch of linguistics that determines how languages organize and express meanings and avoids trying to account for subjective or local meaning. This paper classifies what the semantics is; what it studies; and its types.*

Keywords: *Linguistics, semantics, formal semantics, lexical semantics, conceptual semantics, lexical concepts, semantic primes, dynamic semantics, inquisitive semantics.*

INTRODUCTION

Semantics is the scientific study of language at a level higher than phonetics and phonology, morphology, and syntax. It is generally defined as a study of meaning in language. This term is firstly named by French semantique Breal 1893. Semantics is a formal term for a branch of linguistics that is concerned with studying how meaning is constructed and communicated in written or spoken language. The study of semantics looks at how meaning works in a language, and because of this it often uses native speakers intuitions about the meaning of words and phrases to base research on. When studying the meaning of language, several different branches of semantics exist to consider. These include:

- Formal semantics
- Lexical semantics
- Conceptual semantics

FORMAL SEMANTICS

- is about the meaning of syntactically complex expressions.
- literally means ‘using formal methods’ for the study of meaning.

Formal semantics is the study of grammatical meaning in natural languages using tools from logic, mathematics and theoretical computer science. It is an interdisciplinary field, sometimes regarded as a subfield of both linguistics and philosophy of language. It determines what linguistic expressions imply and how their meanings are composed from the meanings of their parts. The indispensable question of formal semantics is what you know, when you be aware of how to interpret expressions of language. A common assumption is that understanding the meaning of sentence requires knowing its real conditions, or in other words knowing what the world would have to be like for the sentence to be true. For instance, to understand the meaning of English sentence ‘Jane smokes’ any person has to know that it is real when the person Jane performs the action of smoking. However, many present day procedures to formal semantics posit that there is greater to which means than truth-conditions. In the formal semantics framework of inquisitive semantics, understanding the meaning of a sentence also requires knowing what troubles (questions) it raises. For occasion: “Jane smokes but does she drink?” conveys the same truth-conditional data as the previous example, however, also raises a problem of whatever Jane drinks or not. Other methods generalize the idea of fact conditionally or deal with it as epiphenomenal. For instance: in dynamic semantics, knowing which means of a sentence amounts to understanding how it updates a context. Pietroski treats meanings as instructions to construct standarts.

LEXICAL SEMANTICS

- the study of classification and decomposition of lexical items.
- the differences and similarities in lexical semantics structure cross-linguistically.
- the relationship of lexical meaning to sentence meaning and syntax.

Lexical semantics (also known as lexicosemantics), as a subfield of linguistic semantics, is the study of word meanings. It consists of how the phrase forms and their meaning, how they are used in grammar and compositionality, and the connection between the definite senses and uses of a word. The parts of analysis in lexical semantics are lexical units which consists of sub-words or sub-units such as affixes, compound words and phrases. Lexical items contain information about category (lexical and syntactic), forms and meaning. The semantics related to these categories then relate to each lexical item in the lexicon. The lexicon is a collection of words in a language that is organized into series of lexical units. Lexical semantics investigates

how the meaning of lexical units correlates with the structure of language or syntax. This is also known as the syntax – semantics interface. As an example: the word “book” has different senses due to the context. In most context “book” refers to a bound collection of pages which is read by humans. In contrast, “book” refers to make an action or event a matter of record (e.g. “Unable to book a hotel room, a man snaked into a nerby private residence where police arrested him and later booked him for unlawful entry”.) Lexical semantics can help us to identify the correct word use by contextualizing it in surrounding language and context.

CONCEPTUAL SEMANTICS

Conceptual semantics is a framework for semantic analysis, developed mainly by Ray Jackendoff in 1976. Conceptual semantics deals with the core meaning of expression. It is also called the denotative or literal meaning. It is essential for the functioning of language. For example: a part of conceptual meaning of “needle” may be “thin”, “sharp” or “instrument”. These components would be part of the conceptual semantics is to investigate: “... how linguistic utterances are related to human cognition. Where cognition is a human capacity that is to a considerable degree independence of language, interacting with the perceptual and action systems as well as language”. (Jackendoff 2006:355)

Conceptual semantics seperates the single, universal meaning of words. In addition to the conceptual representation of the actual referent, rather than the lexical – semantic meaning, here the two are combined into what Jackendoff calls “lexical concepts”. The semantics of concepts does not refer to the mental lexicon in the classical sense. Concepts and references do not have a definition attached, only the ideas or reference of concept itself. Conceptual semantics breaks lexical concepts up into ontological categories: events, states, places, amounts, things and property, to name a few. These ontological categories are called semantic primes, or semantic primitives. Jackendoff argues that using these semantic primes, any idea in the human brain can be expressed. Conceptual semantics is formative, in that the meanings of words, clauses, and sentences can be determined from the lexical structures that make them up.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, we use semantics to make sense of our words. It takes into account cultural references social myths, and historical events. Semantics is perhaps the reason why it is so difficult to comprehend something that has no meaning and that changes from place to place. Our language would be much more primitive than it is today, but because of it we can make sense of situations, make connections and understand the truth.

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