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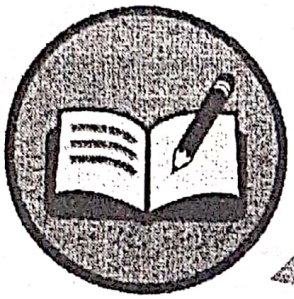

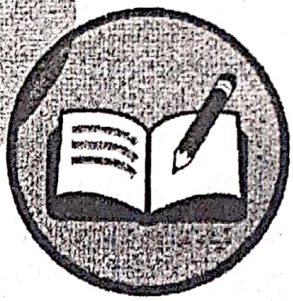

Semantics & Syntax

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SEMANTICS

HELLO EVERYONE!

Last time, we started talking about **semantics**. We said it is the study of **meaning** of morphemes, words, phrases and sentences.

We said we have types of semantics:

- **Lexical semantics**
- **Phrasal semantics**
- **Sentential semantics**

Student: what about functional semantics?

Instructor: it is related to pragmatics. Pragmatics deals with meaning in a context.

❖ Compositional Semantics:

It is the compose of morphemes or words within a sentence. It is related to individual words; to know the meaning of every single word in the sentence. If you want to know what is the meaning of a sentence, you should be familiar with the individual words; the components of this sentence. If I say:

- ***Jack swims***

You can understand the meaning of this sentence. (***Jack***) is a proper name, and (***swims***) is the action of swimming. If I ask you; Is this sentence true or false?

We can't say if it is true or false. We need evidence to judge if this sentence is true or false. For example, if you know in advance that Jack never ever swims, and I told you that Jack swims. Now your judgment is that this sentence is false according to the back information. Maybe I am misinformed or I am lying. That is how you judge.

In semantics it is very important to know the meaning. When you know the meaning of a sentence, it means you can **ascribe the value** of the sentence.

"**Value**" here means the **truth value**; if it is true or false.

Student: do you mean the credibility of the sentence?

Instructor: yes, when you know the meaning of this sentence, you

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can judge the truth value of the sentence. You have the ability to judge if this sentence is true or false.

If I say:

- ***Circles are round.***

This is a **FACT**. You can't judge if it is true or false. Facts are always true. There is no need to judge.

When I say "***Jack swims***", here I need a proof/situation to judge. But if I say "***Circles are round***", this is a fact and it will not change.

We call those sentences **tautology**. It means they are related to facts. All the time they are true.

- ***A single man is not married.***

This is **tautology**. It is a fact. We can also call it **analytical**.

- ***Circles are squares.***

It is false. Here your judgment is: this sentence all the time is false. We call these kinds of sentences **contradiction**.

- ***All bachelors are married.***

This is contradiction.

- ***Girls are boys.***
- ***The yoghurt is black.***
- ***Dead people are alive.***

Obviously these sentences are examples of contradiction.

If I say this sentence is true without anything, and you understand the meaning of this sentence, can you judge if this sentence is true or false? I didn't say any sentence. I didn't show you any sentence. so you know nothing. We don't know. We have a small set of sentences that we can't judge. We **can't ascribe** the truth value of the sentence. We call them **paradox**. Here we have no judgment.

It is like philosophy a little bit.

Terms you need to remember:

Compositional semantics - truth value – tautology / analytical – contradiction – paradox.

So far compositional semantics is working. Later on you will see that it is not working with all sentences.

Let's go back to the example of "***Jack swims***". If I say:

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- ***Jack swims beautifully.***

You know that Jack is a poor swimmer. He is not professional. I said:

- ***Jack swims. Jack swims beautifully.***

What do you think?

Student: he knows how to swim

Instructor: yes, he knows how to swim, but not necessarily he is a good swimmer. He is a poor swimmer.

Can I say "***Jack swims beautifully. Jack swims***"?

Student: No

Instructor: excellent! We can't because here we have something called **entailment**. It means we have direction. Entailment goes in one direction. Here we have one sentence entails the other.

- ***Jack swims. Jack swims beautifully.*** ✓
- ***Jack swims beautifully. Jack swims.*** ×

This is called **entailment**. It is like a logical **sequence**.

However, we have cases where we can switch. We have some sentences that can entail each other. For example:

- ***Jack put off the meeting. Jack postponed the meeting.***

Here they are **synonyms**. Those two sentences can entail each other if they are synonyms. It means I can say also:

- ***Jack postponed the meeting. Jack put off the meeting.***

So they can go in two directions. They entail each other because they are synonyms.

If I say:

- ***Jack is alive. Jack is not dead.***

Here we have **negation**. They entail each other because we have negation. (alive) means (not dead). The two sentences are contradictory if one entails the negation of the other. Don't get confused between "contradictory" and "contradiction". They are different. I say:

- ***Jack is alive. Jack is dead.***

Here it is contradiction.

Compositional semantics in Arabic means (المعنى التركيبي / الإنشائي).

Semantics is just terms and it is philosophical.

- ***Jack is married. Jack is not single.***

This is contradictory. So we have negation.

I want you just to memorize terms.

In syntax, we talked about **ambiguity**. We have two kinds of ambiguous sentences. Let's see:

- ***The boy saw the man with a telescope.***
- ***I will meet you at the bank***

The two sentences are ambiguous. Where is the ambiguity of the second sentence?

The ambiguity is in the word (bank). Do I mean the financial institution (البنك) or do I mean the side of the river (الضفة)? The ambiguity is only in the word. We call this kind "**lexical ambiguity**". We call it "lexical" because it is related to the "lexicon". "Lexicon" is related to words.

Student: if we have this sentence in context, it wouldn't be ambiguous.

Instructor: yes, of course. But here it is out of context. That is why it is ambiguous.

The second sentence is called "**lexical ambiguity**" because it is related to the lexical; only one word.

The first sentence is called "**structural ambiguity**" because it is related to the structure. It is either the man who was holding a telescope or the boy saw the man by using a telescope.

In the EXAM, you will face such kinds of ambiguous sentences. You will determine if it is lexical or structural ambiguity or you will identify the meaning and something like that.

Student: could we have both kinds of ambiguity in the same sentence?

Instructor: it is very rare. We may have a word that has two, three or even four meanings. If you open the dictionary, you would find that a word can have multiple meanings.

Now we are talking about **compositional semantics**. If I write:

- ***Colorless green ideas slept furiously.***

Colorless means without colors. Blain also means without colors.

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Student: I know the words but I don't understand the sentence.

Instructor: so you don't understand the sentence even though you know all the single words. Compositional semantics is concerned about the meaning of every single word in a sentence. Does it work here?

Student: No

Instructor: so compositional semantics **CANNOT** be applied for all sentences. That is why I asked you from the beginning if compositional semantics can be applied to all sentences or not.

This sentence is grammatically correct, but it is not logical. It has no sense. We call such kind of sentences "**anomalous**". It is taken from the noun "**anomaly**". It means weird and odd.

There is a violation of S-selection here. How come colorless with green!? How can ideas be colorful?! "Ideas" is an abstract word. Colors are used for concrete words. It is not logical! How can ideas sleep?! This is for humans or animate creatures.

Student: we have a personification here.

Instructor: so sometimes such things are used but for poetry to create an image. But in fact such things are anomalous. If I say:

- ***Walls have ears.***

Is it anomalous? No, we call this a **metaphor**. Metaphors are originally anomalous because walls don't have actual ears. But they become **fixed** according to the culture. We say "walls have ears" to say that maybe someone is hearing us. So it is related to the **culture**. So we say it is used and it has a meaning and it is not weird.

- ***Time is money.***

According to the **culture**, all of us know that we are paid according to the number of hours and days. That is why we have this **metaphor**.

We have more expressions like:

- ***Save time***
- ***Time flies***

"Time" is an abstract. But here it is metaphors. You should know the culture, because metaphors are based on the culture.

❖ Idioms:

What about "**idioms**"? Are they anomalous?

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Student: not necessary

Instructor: what is the difference between metaphors and idioms? They are **expressions**. You **can't** translate the meaning of idioms based on individual words. Idioms have **fixed** meaning. You should memorize them. You should add them to your lexicon.

We said that "lexicon" means words in dictionary. Also when we memorize words and learn them, we have lexicon in our **mental storehouse**. When you memorize words, they are kept in your mental storehouse. They are the information that you store in your mind. This is also called lexicon.

Idioms originally are metaphors or anomalous. Then they become frozen. Examples:

- ***Sell down the river.***

Try to translate it literally. If you translate it literally (بيع النهر), it is very funny. Of course it doesn't make sense. This idiom **sell down the river** means to betray one for a personal benefit(خيانة).

- ***Eat my hat.***

Of course it doesn't mean (اكل قبعتي). For example they say:

- ***She doesn't study. She is so lazy. I will eat my hat if she will pass.***

It is like (بقص ايدي اذا بتنجح). This is what we mean "eat my hat".

So idioms have fixed meaning. They are interesting.

- ***Put his foot in his mouth.***

What does it mean?

Student: tell him to shut up

Instructor: Yes! Maybe he is saying something embarrassing or annoying and he is shushing him.

- ***Put yourself in my shoes.***

It means (ضع نفسك مكاني).

- ***Cut it out.***

It means (انهيها). For example you are arguing and shouting and someone says to you "cut it out". It means (فرطوها أو انهوها).

- ***Bite the bullet.***

It means be patient.

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- ***Break a leg.***

It means good luck.

Usually idioms are informal.

- ***Bite your tongue.***

It means shut up or as we say (ابلعها).

- ***Hit it off.***

It means to be friendly with each other. In Arabic it means (ضربناها صحبة).

Idioms should be memorized because they have fixed meaning.

In general, in phrasal verbs you can switch between the words, but in idioms you **cannot** switch.

Student: حتجيبيلنا شي خارجي بالامتحان؟

Instructor: of course the examples are external.

Student: even the idioms?

Instructor: idioms no, because you can't understand the meaning if you don't memorize it.

❖ Lexical relations:

They are words that are semantically related to one another in a variety of ways. The words that describe these relations often end in the bound morpheme *-nym*. Lexical relations are synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, polysemy, homonyms / homophones and metonyms.

SYNONYMS

It means (ترادف). They are words that have the same meaning; equivalent words. Some synonyms are perfect and some synonyms are not. For example:

- ***Couch = Sofa***

They have exactly the same meaning. But there are some synonyms that are not perfect. They are a little bit difference. For example:

- ***Handsome = beautiful = attractive = pretty***

Handsome is generally used for men. Beautiful and pretty are generally used for women. So they have the same meaning but they are a little bit different. We can say beautiful for men, but it is rarely used. So those two words are synonyms but not perfect synonyms.

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- ***Annoy = bother = disturb = upset = harass = irritate = grate = tease = torment = pester = plague = gall***

All of these are synonyms. Memorize these for now. There are a lot of synonyms.

We use synonyms to enrich your vocabulary. Synonyms also help you in translation. If you want to get high scores in writing, you should use lot of synonyms. If you use the same word many times, you will lose marks. You should use a variety of vocabs.

Do you ask yourself why do we have a lot of synonyms in English? It is because of the influence of very different language groups like Germany and Latin. After the Roman conquer, a lot of French words entered English. That is why we have a lot of synonyms. For example:

- ***Manly = virile***

Which one is Germanic and which one is Latin? "***Manly***" is Germanic and "***virile***" is Latin. These two words have the same meaning. They means (شيخ الشباب \ رجولي). They are used for men who have a lot of energy.

- ***Send = transmit***

"***send***" is Germanic and "***transmit***" is Latin.

- ***Go down = descend***

"***go down***" is German and "***descend***" is Latin.

ANTONYMS

They are words that have opposite meanings. We have types of antonyms. If I say for example:

- ***Dead ≠ alive***

They are totally opposite. There is no scales. It is either dead or alive.

- ***Present ≠ absent***

You either be present or absent. You can't be in-between. There is no scales.

- ***Awake ≠ asleep***
- ***Increase ≠ decrease***

Of course we have a lot more than that. We call these

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complementary antonyms. They are either or. There is **no scales** between them.

They are called "***complementary antonyms***" because they complete each other. For example, if you are asleep, it means you aren't awake. If you are present, it means you aren't absent. They are complementary in that alive = not dead and dead = not alive, and so on.

The other type of antonyms is **gradable antonyms**. For example:

- ***Tall ≠ short***
- ***Old ≠ new***
- ***High ≠ low***
- ***Difficult ≠ easy***

They are called "***gradable antonyms***" because we have levels. We have **scales**. They are not absolute antonyms.

Complementary antonyms are absolute antonyms.

To make it easy for you; if you can form comparative or superlative forms from those adjectives, it means they are gradable. For example you can say (tall → taller), but it is wrong to say (deader). It doesn't make sense.

Under gradable antonyms, we have something called "**marked**" and "**unmarked**". For example:

The word (***high***) is unmarked. The word (***low***) is marked. I ask you by saying for example:

- ***How high is the mountain?***

I don't say:

- ***How low is the mountain?***

So I usually use (high) here not (low). That is why (high) is unmarked and (low) is marked.

"**Marked**" means the uncommon; **not normal**. "**Unmarked**" means the **normal**; the common.

Another example I say:

- ***How tall are you?***

I don't say:

- ***How short are you?***

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So here (tall) is unmarked and (short) is marked.

Another characteristic of certain pairs of gradable antonyms is that one is **marked** and the other **unmarked**. The unmarked member is the one used in questions of degree. We ask, ordinarily, "How *high* is the mountain?" (not "How low is it?"). We answer "Ten thousand feet high" but never "Ten thousand feet low," except humorously or ironically. Thus *high* is the *unmarked* member of *high/ low*. Similarly, *tall* is the unmarked member of *tall/short*, *fast* the unmarked member of *fast/slow*, and so on.

When you use the **gradable** antonyms in **questions of degree**, you should use the **unmarked**. Another example we ask:

- ***How far...?***

Not:

- ***How near...?***

(far) is unmarked. (near) is marked.

- ***How difficult...?*** ✓
- ***How easy...?*** ×
- ***How long does it take?*** ✓
- ***How short...?*** ×

The third type is **relational antonyms**. For example:

- ***Give ≠ receive***
- ***Buy ≠ sell***

So here we have a correlation between the seller and the buyer.

- ***Teacher ≠ student***
- ***Doctor ≠ patient***
- ***Give ≠ receive***
- ***Employer ≠ employee***
- ***Trainer ≠ trainee***
- ***Parents ≠ children***

So these are called "***relational antonyms***" because there is a **relation** between them.

The fourth type is called **autoantonyms** or **contranyms**. For example the word (***dust***). It has two meanings: even to remove dust or to spread something or to cover. You can spread the blusher for example. This is dust. These two meanings are opposite to each other.

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It is either to remove or to spread. This is **auto-antonym**.

Another example is the word (cleave). It has two meanings. It is either "to split apart" يشق or "to cling together" يلصق. So it has opposite meanings.

We have other types of antonyms also. For example:

- ***Valuable ≠ invaluable***

Valuable and invaluable have almost the same meaning. Also we have:

- ***Flammable ≠ inflammable***

Also they have the same meaning. We call these "**antiautonyms**". They have the same or nearly the same meaning, despite looking like antonyms.

Thank you

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