Section 2: Word meaning or lexical meaning

2.1. Semantic features

• **Definition**

✓Semantic features or semantic components or semantic properties are *"**the smallest units of meaning in a word**."*

✓We identify the meaning of a word by its semantic features.

Example:

father: [+human], [+male], [+mature], [+parental] and [+paternal].

hen: [+animate], [+bird], [+fowl], [+fully grown] and [+female].

2.1. Semantic features - Characteristics

1. A redundancy rule:

- If father is [+human], it is therefore [−inhuman];

- If father is [+male], it is therefore [−female];

2. Different words may share the same semantic feature:

- *Doctor, engineer, teacher, physicist, chemist, tailor, hairdresser*, etc. all share the same semantic feature **[+professional]**

- *Mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister, grandparent, aunt, uncle,* etc. are all **[+kinship]**

2.1. Semantic features - Characteristics

3. The same semantic feature can occur in words of different parts of speech.

➢ **[+female]** is part of the meaning of

the <u>noun</u> *mother*,

the <u>verb</u> *breast-feed*

the <u>adjective</u> *pregnant*.

➢ **[+educational]** is a semantic feature found in

the <u>nouns</u> *school, teacher, textbook*, etc.

the <u>verbs</u> *teach, educate, instruct*, etc.
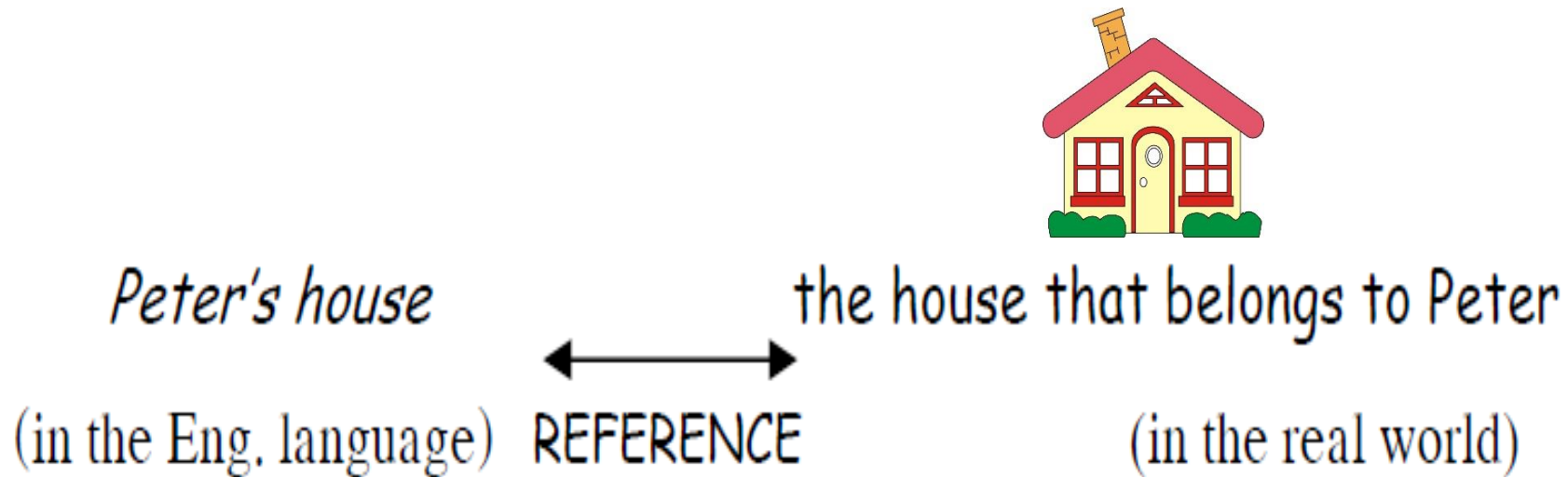
2.1. Semantic features - Characteristics

4. "The semantic properties of words determine what other words they can be combined with." (Fromkin and Rodman,1993: 148-149)

- **My brother is an only child.*

- **The bachelor is pregnant.*

- **Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.*

→ the above sentences that are **grammatically correct** and **syntactically perfect** but **semantically anomalous**.

2.2. Referent, reference and sense

- A **referent** is *an object or an entity in the real world or in the world of your imagination*, e.g. your school, your classmates, your teacher, the idealistic working conditions you have ever dreamed of, etc.

- The **reference** of **a word** or **a linguistic expression** is *the relationship between that word or expression and the thing* (book), *the action* (read), *the event* (graduate from university), *the quality* (sincerity), etc. *it refers to.*

Peter's house

(in the Eng. language)   REFERENCE   the house that belongs to Peter

(in the real world)

2.2. **Referent**, **reference** and **sense**

- The **sense** of **a word** or **a linguistic expression** shows *the internal relationship between that word or expression and others* in the vocabulary of a language.

Ex1. *Teacher* and *student* have the sense relationship of the former is the one *who gives a lesson* and the latter is the one *who has the lesson given by the former*.

Ex2. *A dog is chasing a cat* has some sense.

However, *a dog is human* has no sense.

Identify **referent**, **reference** and **sense** via **their main features**.

	REFERENT	REFERENCE	SENSE
	in the external world	between a language and the external world	in a language
	either real or imaginary	abstract	abstract
bachelor	a man who has not ever been married	the relationship between <u>the word</u> *bachelor* and a certain unmarried man	*unmarried man*
Bạch Tuyết	the lovely princess in a fairy tale which I have already read	the relationship between <u>the name</u> *Bạch Tuyết* and the very princess	*"Tuyết Trắng"*

Distinction between **variable reference**, **constant reference** and **co-reference**

- When **the same linguistic expression refers to different referents**, it has **variable reference**: *the present prime minister* used in Britain *in 1944 is* <u>*Mr. Churchill*</u> and *in 1982 is* <u>*Mrs. Thatcher*</u>.

- When **one linguistic expression refers to one and the same referent**, it has **constant reference**: *the sun, the moon, Halley's comet, the People's Republic of China, Angola, the United Nations, FIFA, UNESCO, etc.*

- When **two or more linguistic expressions share the same referent**, they have **co-reference**: the *morning star* and the *evening star* both refer to <u>*the planet*</u> called Venus.