

Semantics

Nguyen Vuong Quoc

References

1. Cole, P. and Morgan, J.L. (eds.) (1975) *Syntax and semantics 3: Speech acts*. New York: Academic Press.
2. Cole, P. (ed.) (1978) *Syntax and semantics 9: Pragmatics*. New York: Academic Press.
3. Fromkin, V. and Rodman, R. (1993) *An Introduction to Language*. Fifth Edition. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers
4. Le Van Su (2000) *English Linguistics*. Dong Nai Publishing House.

5. Nick Riemer (2010), *Introducing Semantics*, CUP.

6. To Minh Thanh (2010) *English Semantics*. Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh City

Syllabus

Main course: James R. Hurford, Brendan Heasley, Micheal Smith,
Semantics – A Coursebook, 2nd edition, CUP, 2007.

Teaching 10 units, including:

Chapter 1: Basic ideas in Semantics: Units 1, 2, 3.

Chapter 2: From reference ...: Units 4, 5, 6.

Chapter 3: ... to senses: Units 9, 10, 11.

Chapter 6: Interpersonal and non-literal meaning: Unit 27

Testing

Mid-term test:

Time: week 6, including: Chapters 1, 2 (six units).

Rate: Writing (60%) and multiple choice (40%)

Final test:

Time: After the semester

Rate: Writing (60%) and multiple choice (40%)

Chapter one

UNIT 1 ABOUT SEMANTICS

SEMANTICS is the study of MEANING in LANGUAGE.

Ex: I (in English)

Je (in French)

我 (in Chinese)

SPEAKER MEANING is what a speaker means (i.e. intends to convey) when he uses a piece of language.

Ex: She is a Thi No. (in Vietnamese)

He works as hard as a dog. (in English)

Ghét anh ghê! (I love you)

SENTENCE MEANING (or WORD MEANING) is what a sentence (or word) means, i.e. what it counts as the equivalent of in the language concerned.

Ex: Je t'aime.

Ich liebe dich.

Я люблю тебя = тебя люблю Я = люблю тебя Я

我爱你。

A THEORY is a precisely specified, coherent, and economical frame-work of interdependent statements and definitions, constructed so that as large a number as possible of particular basic facts can either be seen to follow from it or be describable in terms of it.

Ex: In English there are nine basic sentence patterns.

Semantics

Speaker meaning

Sentence meaning

Theory

Semantics

Nguyen Vuong
Quoc

UNIT 3: REFERENCE AND SENSE

REFERENCE

By means of REFERENCE, a speaker indicates which things in the world (including persons) are being talked about.

Ex: Donald Trump (person)

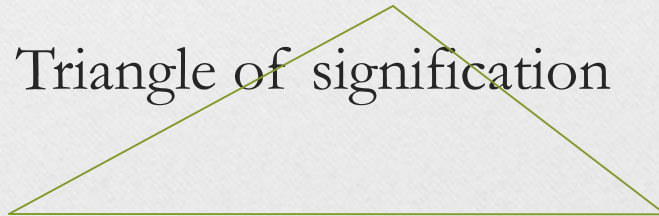
The Statue of Liberty (thing)

Word

Sense

Reference

The Triangle of signification



SENSE

To turn from reference to sense, the SENSE of an expression is its place in a system of semantic relationships with other expressions in the language. The first of these semantic relationships that we will mention is sameness of meaning, an intuitive concept which we will illustrate by example. We will deal first with the senses of words in context.

Ex: Every word has its sense, but it may not have reference.

Every expression that has meaning has sense, but not every expression has reference.

The notions of sense and reference are central to the study of meaning. Every further unit in this book will make use of one or another of these notions.

Summary:

Sense: expression of something or somebody.

Reference: Whom/What we talk about.

we can perceive.

The idea of reference is relatively solid and easy to understand. The idea of sense is more elusive: it is a bit like electricity, which we all know how to use (and even talk about) in various ways, without ever being sure what exactly it is. Even semanticists aren't sure exactly what sense is, but you'll find that your grasp of it and your appreciation of the usefulness of the concept will grow as you study more. (The importance of the sense/reference distinction was most influentially demonstrated by the German philosopher Gottlob Frege.)

+ A referent is an object or an entity in the real world or in the world of your imagination.

Ex: a room, a rat, a dragon

+ The reference of a word or a linguistic expression is the relationship between that word or expression and the thing, the action, the event, the quality, etc. it refers to.

Ex: Mary's book

Mary's book

the book that belongs to Mary



+ 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.

Ex: doctor and patient

Man

A

And

Pen

House

Because

Dragon

From

- All of them have meaning (sense).
- Sense is the meaning of a word in a dictionary.

Man

A

And

Pen

House

Because

Dragon

From

- ☛ Man, Pen, House, Dragon: we can perceive (see). They are called referents (referring expressions)

Man

A

And

Pen

House

Because

Dragon

From

- A, And, Because, From: have sense but they are not referents.
- A thing (person) we can perceive is called a referent.

+ Variable reference: The same word/phrase refers to different referents.

Ex: Teacher: Many people are teachers.

+ Constant reference: One word/phrase refers to one referent.

Ex: M.U., Real Madrid, Pele, Vietnam

+ Co-reference: Two or more words/phrases refer to the same referent.

Ex: Ho Chi Minh, Nguyen Ai Quoc, Nguyen Tat Thanh: one person

The morning star, the evening star: Venus

Summary

Speaker meaning

Sentence meaning

Utterance

Sentence

Proposition

Sense

Reference

Referent: Variable, constant, co-referent

Sense vs. Proposition

(1) Johnny

(2) - Who ate the cake?

- Johnny.

Johnny in (1) is not a proposition because it is only a word.

Johnny in (2) is a proposition because it is an elliptical sentence – **Johnny ate the cake.**

Chapter two

From reference . . .

UNIT 4: REFERRING EXPRESSIONS

A REFERRING EXPRESSION is any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or someone (or a clearly delimited collection of things or people), i.e. used with a particular referent in mind.

Ex: The name *Fred* in an utterance such as ‘Fred hit me’, where the speaker has a particular person in mind when he says ‘Fred’, is a referring expression.

Fred in ‘There’s no Fred at this address’ is not a referring expression, because in this case a speaker would not have a particular person in mind in uttering the word.

An OPAQUE CONTEXT is a part of a sentence which could be made into a complete sentence by the addition of a referring expression, but where the addition of different referring expressions, even though they refer to the same thing or person, in a given situation, will yield sentences with DIFFERENT meanings when uttered in a given situation.

Jack, an English boy, has just come to Vietnam.

Lan tells him: “Chi Pheo lives in Vu Dai village”.

Lan also tells him: “Ba Kien hates Thi No’s lover”.

✦ Jack thinks that ~~Chi Pheo and Thi No’s lover~~ are two different people.

✦ This is an opaque context in which Jack thinks that Chi Pheo is not Thi No’s lover or these two referents are different.

An EQUATIVE SENTENCE is one which is used to assert the identity of the referents of two referring expressions, i.e. to assert that two referring expressions have the same referent.

The following are equative sentences:

-
- *That woman over there is my daughter's teacher.*
 - *Quang Trung is Nguyen Hue.*
- The two referring expressions can replace each other.

Chi Pheo is Thi No's lover.

☛ This is an equative sentence.

☛ Chi Pheo = Thi No's lover

We, Vietnamese people, know this fact.

Summary

Speaker meaning

Sentence meaning

Utterance

Sentence

Proposition

Sense

Reference

Referent: Variable, constant, co-referent

Referring expression

Opaque context

Equative sentence

GOOD LUCK!