

Theories of Meaning

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Exemplar Theory
Componential Analysis
Reference and Sense
Implication, Entailment and
Presupposition

Exemplar Theory

- Concept is presented as a collection of memory traces of individual examples.
- Centrality based on similarity to stored concepts.
- As successful as prototype theory.
- Advantages of Exemplar over prototype:
 - Can account for atypical members
 - Three legged dog that does not bark
 - A penguin

Componential Analysis

- Meanings can be understood as being composed of parts.
- Indivisible units of meaning. Like Atoms.
- Semantic Components. Componential Analysis.
- 'girl' = [young] + [female] + [human]
'man' = [adult] + [male] + [human]
'filly' = [young] + [female] + [horse]

Componential Analysis

- Can be used to describe semantic relations.
- Eg. Hyponymy.
- W1 is 'animal'.
W2 is 'horse'
W3 is 'mare'
'animal' = [animal]
'horse' = [equine] + [animal]
'mare' = [female] + [equine] + [animal]
W2 is a hyponym of W1 if all of the semantic components of W1 are included in the componential analysis of W2.
Similarly W3 is a hyponym of W2

Componential Analysis

- Semantic components are used as parts of many theories to explain meaning.
- Sometimes the concept of 'semantic features' is used along with semantic components.
- Semantic feature is a semantic component that has been assigned a value '+' or '-'.
- eg. The notions male and female can be represented by the features [+male] for 'male' and [-male] for 'female'

Componential Analysis

- ◉ Semantic components are supposed to be universal across all human languages.
- ◉ They are fewer in number than words.
- ◉ They can combine in various ways, generate nuanced meanings.
- ◉ Like phonemes combine, semantic components also combine.
- ◉ Supposedly an inherent feature of the human conceptual system.

Some more concepts/theories in Semantics

- ◉ Reference and Sense
- ◉ 2 aspects of meaning.
- ◉ Consider the word 'dog'.
- ◉ A) it can mean a dog that you see. I.e, a dog in the real world – a real dog.
- ◉ B) it can also mean the qualities/properties associated with dogs. In other words, 'the concept' dog.

Reference and Sense

- The word 'dog' can 'refer' to the set of all dogs in the world.
- 'Reference' or 'Extension' of a word is that aspect of its meaning that allows it to make true statements about the world.

Reference and Sense

- Sense or Intension is that aspect of the meaning of a word that comprises the qualities, properties or characteristics associated with that concept.
- Connotation – related to sense and intension.
- The non truth conditional aspects of meaning.
- Eg. Derogatory nature of certain words – hovel or slum.
- Difference in formality ‘kick the bucket’ and ‘pass away’.
- Characteristic features ‘barking’ connotes ‘dog’

Reference and Sense

- Denotation is related to 'reference' and 'extension'. That aspect of the meaning of a linguistic expression used to make true statements of the world.

Implication, Entailment and Presupposition

- The meaning of sentences or statements are called propositions.
- Simplest proposition consists of an 'argument' and a 'predicate'.
- Eg. In 'Pete is tall.' 'Pete' is the argument and '(is) tall' is the predicate.
- Argument = the entity about which something is 'said'.
- Predicate = what is 'said' about the argument.

Implication, Entailment and Presupposition

- ◉ Some predicates may require more than one argument.
- ◉ Eg. The predicate 'like' in 'Pete likes Liz' has 2 arguments 'Pete' and 'Liz'.
- ◉ The predicate 'give' in 'Pete gave Liz a present' has three arguments 'Pete', 'Liz' and 'present'.
- ◉ A proposition has a truth value. Ie, it is either 'true' or 'false'.

Implication, Entailment and Presupposition

- The same proposition may be expressed through different sentences.
- Eg 'Pete is here.'
 - ' My brother is here'
 - 'Liz's boyfriend is here'.

May all refer to the same proposition.

Implication, Entailment and Presupposition

- Entailment
- *Jane sings beautifully.*
Jane sings.
- The first sentence entails the second.
- Entailment is a meaning relation between sentences A and B such that A entails B if B is always true if A is true.
- Negating both sentences reverses the entailment.
- *Jane does not sing.*
- *Jane does not sing beautifully.*

Implication, Entailment and Presupposition

- Synonymity among sentences
- Synonyms – words with same meaning.
- Synonymous sentences – sentences with same meaning.
- Two sentences are synonymous if they entail each other.
- Ie, A entails B and B entails A.
- Jack put off the meeting (A)
- Jack post-poned the meeting. (B)

Implication, Entailment and Presupposition

- Two sentences are contradictory if one entails the negation of the other.1
- Eg. Jack is a handsome boy (A)
Jack is an ugly boy. (B)

No entailment between A and B

A^1 = Jack is not a handsome boy.

B^1 = Jack is not an ugly boy.

A entails B^1

B entails A^1

Therefore A and B are contradictory.

Presupposition

- A proposition
 - whose truth is taken for granted by the producer of an utterance
 - Which must be known and taken account of for the utterance to make sense to an interpreter.
- Eg. Proposition 'Pete has stopped smoking'.
- This presupposes the proposition 'Pete smokes'.

Presupposition

- Presupposition is different from entailment.
- A) Jane sings beautifully.
B) Jane sings.
A entails B

A^1 = Jane does not sing beautifully.

A^1 does not entail B

Negating an entailment breaks it.

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- \bar{A} = Pete has stopped smoking
 - B = Pete smokes.
 - \bar{A} presupposes B

 - $A1$ = Pete has not stopped smoking.

 - $A1$ still presupposes B

 - Negating a presupposition does not destroy it.

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- ◉ Utterance: Liz regrets/does not regret selling the house.
 - ◉ Presupposition: Liz sold the house.
 - ◉ Liz plays/does not play the bassoon brilliantly.
 - ◉ Liz plays the bassoon.

Implications/Implicatures

- Parts of the meanings of utterances which, although intended are not strictly par of what is 'said' in the act of utterance.
- Different from presupposition because they do not logically follow from what is said.
- 2 types:
- a)conventional implicatures: those which have a stable association with particular linguistic expressions.
- Eg: 'Haven't you finished yet?'
 - Pete hasn't registered.
 - Pete hasn't registered yet.
- The second sentence implies that Pete means to register.

Implicatures

- B) Conversational Implicatures: implicatures that must be inferred from contextual information. Context is crucial.
- Eg. A: Can I speak to Jane?
B: She's in the shower. Can you call back?
A: How old are you?
B: That's none of your business.