# Word senses I

Prof. Joseph Pentangelo

LING 405: Semantics & Pragmatics

29 September 2023

# Don't forget! Quiz#2 is due now.

- If you haven't submitted it yet, do so now!
- Late submissions will <u>not</u> be accepted.

# What we'll cover…

- Review of WA2
- Recap of last week
- Chapter 5 (sections 5.1–5.4.2)
- What's due next week

# Writing Assignment #2

Median score: 4

# WA2 Review

Write five pairs of sentences that meet the following specifications:

- 1a entails 1b.
- 2a and 2b are contrary.
- 3a and 3b are contradictory.
- 4a and 4b are paraphrases.
- 5a and 5b are independent.

Do not reuse sentences from the textbook or our slides.

If *p* entails *q*:
- if *p* is true, *q* must be true
- if *q* is false, *p* must be false
- if *p* is false, *q* may be true or false

If *p* and *q* are contrary:
- *p* and *q* cannot both be true
- *p* and *q* can both be false

If *p* and *q* are contradictory:
- if *p* is true, *q* must be false, and vice versa

If *p* and *q* are paraphrases:
- *p* and *q* must both be either true or false

If *p* and *q* are independent:
- *p* and *q* can each be either true or false, independently

# WA2 Review

Write five pairs of sentences that meet the following specifications:

- **1a entails 1b.**
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If *p* entails *q*:
- if *p* is true, *q* must be true
- if *q* is false, *p* must be false
- if *p* is false, *q* may be true or false

Sal threw the football and broke the window.
The window is broken.

Max is a fluffy dog.
Max is a dog.

My mom blew out the candle.
The candle is no longer lit.

# WA2 Review

Write five pairs of sentences that meet the following specifications:

- 1a entails 1b.
- **2a and 2b are contrary.**
- 3a and 3b are contradictory.
- 4a and 4b are paraphrases.
- 5a and 5b are independent.

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If $p$ and $q$ are contrary:
- $p$ and $q$ cannot both be true
- $p$ and $q$ can both be false

Her dog died last week.
Her dog died today in the morning.

Alice has longer hair than Annie.
Annie has longer hair than Alice.

Her dog is golden.
Her dog is black.

# WA2 Review

Write five pairs of sentences that meet the following specifications:

- 1a entails 1b.
- 2a and 2b are contrary.
- **3a and 3b are contradictory.**
- 4a and 4b are paraphrases.
- 5a and 5b are independent.

Do not reuse sentences from the textbook or our slides.

If $p$ and $q$ are contradictory:
- if $p$ is true, $q$ must be false, and vice versa

Saturday Night Fever is the professor's favorite album.
Saturday Night Fever is NOT the professor's favorite album.

The cat is white.
The cat is not white.

Ryan Reynolds is my uncle.
Ryan Reynolds is not my uncle.

# WA2 Review

Write five pairs of sentences that meet the following specifications:

- 1a entails 1b.
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- 4a and 4b are paraphrases.
- 5a and 5b are independent.

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If $p$ and $q$ are paraphrases:
- $p$ and $q$ must both be either true or false

---

Joe won first place in that race.
No one was able to beat Joe in that race.

---

Taylor Swift has released more albums than Selena Gomez.
Selena Gomez has not released as many albums as Taylor Swift has.

---

I have homework due at 12am.
At midnight, my homework is due.

# WA2 Review

- **5a and 5b are independent.**

If $p$ and $q$ are independent:
- $p$ and $q$ can each be either true or false, independently

New York is a famous city in America.
Arizona is hot in the summer.

Mary woke up early for school.
Mary made it to school on time.

I went to bed early last night because I was tired.
I had a delicious dinner last night.

# Recap

- We discussed **presupposition**.
- We established what the **common ground** is.
- We identified presupposition **triggers**, and discovered what can happen when presupposition goes haywire.
- We learned how to distinguish **presupposition** from **entailment**.

# Chapter 5

# Construal

- What is "construal," and what does it have to do with word choice?

"CONSTRUAL […] way of thinking about [what's being discussed]" (p.80)

# Ambiguity

- When "a word-form [...] has more than one sense, and can be used to refer to very different kinds of things" (p.81).

- In Turkish, the verb *içmek* is used for both 'to drink' and 'to smoke'.



Men smoking in the Ottoman Empire.

a. The farmer allows walkers to cross the field for free, but the bull *charges*.

b. Headline: Drunk gets nine months in violin *case*.

c. Headline: Reagan wins on budget, but more *lies* ahead.

# Indeterminacy



- What does it mean when a word is indeterminate?

"[A] word can be used to refer to different sorts of things even though it may have only a single sense" (81).

- What are the examples given in the text?

*cousin* – doesn't specify gender or age

*kick* – doesn't specify which foot

- An indeterminate word leaves some information unspecified. This is <u>different</u> than ambiguity.

**Ambiguity:**
One word-form with 2+ senses.
**Indeterminacy:**
One word sense with some unspecified information.

# Indeterminacy

ficity. For example, Malay has no exact equivalent for the English words *brother* and *sister*. The language uses three terms for siblings: *abang* 'older brother', *kakak* 'older sister', and *adek* 'younger sibling'. The term *adek* is indeterminate with respect to gender, while the English words *brother* and *sister* are indeterminate with respect to relative age.

What are the examples from Mandarin?

What are the examples from Tzeltal?

Look up *fressen* vs. *essen.*

Look up Turkish 3$^{rd}$-person pronouns.

What's the connection between *turtle, tortoise,* and Spanish *tortuga*?

These all serve to illustrate how indeterminacy is language-specific: what's indeterminate in one language may be fully explicated in another.

# Vagueness

- Yet another sort of lexical imprecision is vagueness, which is different from both indeterminacy and ambiguity.

- With vagueness, the strict rules of what it applies to "cannot be precisely defined" (81). What're the example words in the text?

  bald    tall

- Context matters.



Shaquille O'Neil (7'1") posing in front of a model of Robert Wadlow (8'11"), the world's tallest man.

# Bald (?)



George Costanza, portrayed by Jason Alexander, from the TV sitcom *Seinfeld*

- Is this man bald?
- If you think not, how many individual strands of hair would he have to lose to be bald?
- There is no clear tipping point.
- This is the "little-by-little" paradox.

# Vagueness

Three distinguishing characteristics:

- Vagueness has context-dependent truth conditions.

- Vague predicates have borderline cases.

- Vague predicates give rise to "little-by-little" paradoxes.

Additionally, the vagueness of a given notion is usually applicable across languages, while indeterminacy is language-specific.
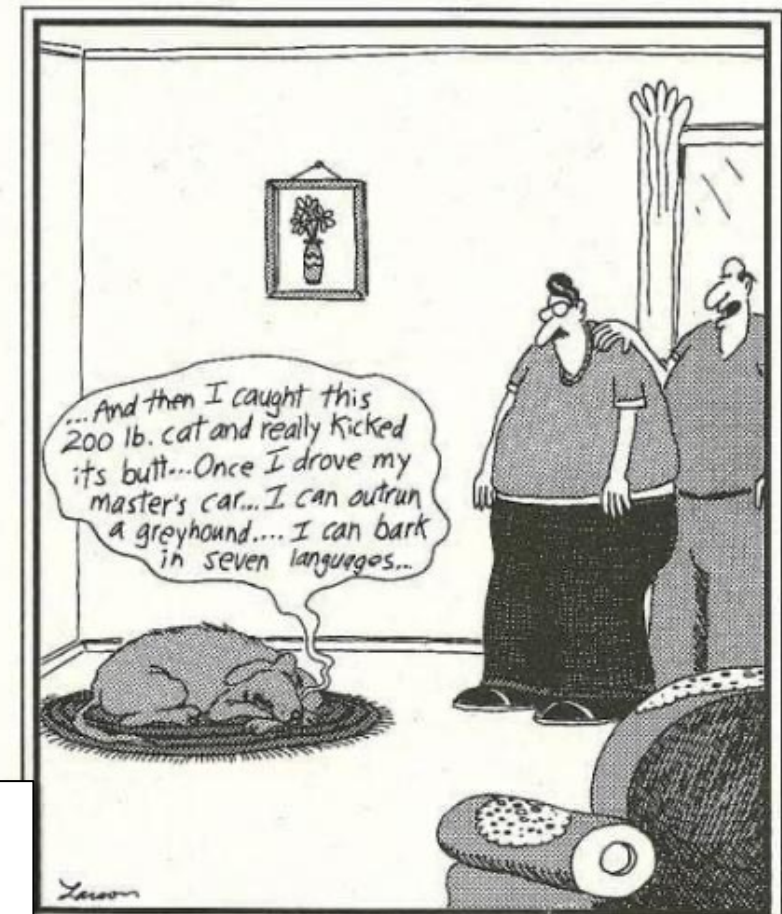
| Vague | Indeterminate |
|---|---|
| *bald, tall, thin, old* | *cousin, kick* |
| Context dependent | Context independent |
| Borderline cases | No borderline cases |
| Little-by-little paradoxes | No paradoxes |
| Cross-linguistic | Language-specific |

# Distinguishing ambiguity, vagueness, and indeterminacy

- If a word is <u>ambiguous</u>, it will be one word form with several senses.

- But a word with a single sense may be <u>vague</u> or <u>indeterminate</u>.

- We can use a number of tests to figure out if a given word is ambiguous, vague, or indeterminate.

The most common tests are based on the principle that distinct senses of an ambiguous word are ANTAGONISTIC. This means that two senses of the word cannot both apply simultaneously. (84)

- What puns are in the text?



"Edgar! Leave him be! ... Always best to let sleeping dogs lie."

Puns rely upon ambiguity.

# Distinguishing ambiguity, vagueness, and indeterminacy

> A clash or incompatibility of senses for a single word in sentences containing a co-ordinate structure, like those in (5), is often referred to using the Greek term ZEUGMA (pronounced ['zugmə]).
>
> (5)    a.  Mary and her visa expired on the same day.[10]
>
>           b.  He carried a strobe light and the responsibility for the lives of his men.[11]
>
>           c.  On his fishing trip, he caught three trout and a cold.[12]

- Zeugma shows ambiguity. It depends upon two different senses.

# Test of contradiction

If a sentence of the form *X but not X* can be true, then expression X <u>must</u> be ambiguous.

- "They are not children anymore, but they are still my children."
- What does this show about the word *child/children*?

- Another example: if a man is lying on the floor and telling the truth, "He is lying but not lying" is true, and thus *lie/lying* is ambiguous.
- "I drink everyday, but I never drink."

# Practice! (p.103 q.A)

State whether the italicized words illustrate ambiguity, vagueness, or indeterminacy:

1. She spends her afternoons *filing* correspondence and her fingernails.
2. He spends his afternoons *washing* clothes and dishes.
3. He was a *big* baby, even though both of his parents are *small*.
4. The weather wasn't very *bright*, but then neither was our tour guide.
5. Mrs. Smith smokes *expensive* cigars but drives a *cheap* car.
6. That girl couldn't *carry* a tune in a bucket.

# Polysemy and homonymy

- What is polysemy?

  "one word with multiple senses" (89)

- What is homonymy?

  "different words that happen to sound the same" (89)

- What's the basic criterion for telling them apart?

  "[I]n cases of polysemy, the two senses are felt to be 'related' in some way; there is 'an intelligible connection of some sort' between the two senses. In cases of homonymy, the two senses are unrelated; that is, the semantic relationship between the two senses is similar to that between any two words selected at random." (89)

# Practice! (p.104 q.B)

In each of the following examples, state which word is ambiguous as demonstrated by the antagonism or zeugma effect. Is it an instance of polysemy or homonymy?

1. You are free to execute your laws, and your citizens, as you see fit.

2. ...and covered themselves with dust and glory.

3. Arthur declined my invitation, and Susan a Latin pronoun.

4. Susan can't bear children.

5. The batteries were given out free of charge.

6. My astrologer wants to marry a star.

# Practice! (p.105 q.A)

Do the uses of *strike* in the following two sentences represent distinct senses (lexical ambiguity) or just indeterminacy? Provide linguistic evidence to support your answer.

a.  The California Gold Rush began when James Marshall *struck* gold at Sutter's Mill.

b.  Balaam *struck* his donkey three times before it turned and spoke to him.

# For 12 October...

Remember: No class next week!

- Finish reading chapter 5
- Complete Writing Assignment #3, which will be assigned soon