

Word senses II

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LING 405: Semantics & Pragmatics

13 October 2023


What's today...

- Quiz #2 review
- Recap of last time
- Chapter 5
- For next week
- Midterm review

Quiz #2

Quiz #2

1. “This is the cat that I saw yesterday.”
The above sentence is:

- a. analytic
-  b. synthetic
- c. a contradiction

An analytic sentence is *always* true, regardless of its context. (“Cats are cats,” “1 is less than 5.”)


A synthetic sentence can be true *or* false, depending on the state of the world. (“Cats are smaller than dogs,” “There are 5 beans in this jar.”)

A contradiction is *always* false, regardless of its context. (“Cats are not cats,” “1 is greater than 5.”)


Quiz #2

2. “This wood came from a tree.”

The above sentence is:

- 
- a. analytic
 - b. synthetic
 - c. a contradiction

Quiz #2

3. (a) “Nobody listens to the Bee Gees anymore.”
(b) “John still listens to the Bee Gees.”
- a. (a) entails (b)
b. (a) and (b) are synonymous (paraphrase)
c. (a) and (b) are contradictory
 (a) and (b) are contrary
e. (a) and (b) are independent

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 synonymous:

- p and q must both be either true or false

If p and q are contradictory:

- if p is true, q must be false, and vice versa

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 independent:

- p and q can each be either true or false, independently

Quiz #2

4. Identify the presupposition trigger and the presupposition in the sentence “Mia succeeded in kicking the ball.”

The trigger is succeeded since it presupposes that Mia's goals and intent was to kick the ball.

Quiz #2

5. Identify the presupposition trigger and the presupposition in the sentence
“Michael forgot to wash the car.”

"Michael forgot to wash the car."

presupposition - Michael intended to wash the car
trigger - forgot

Recap of Last Time

Recap

- Ambiguity: one word form with several senses
 - Zeugma (Mary and her visa *expired...*) shows ambiguity
- Indeterminacy: info. left unspecified
 - Often language specific (e.g. *cousin* unspecified for gender vs. *cugina* specified for gender)
- Vagueness: no absolutely clear boundaries
 - little-by-little paradoxes (at what centimeter is someone *tall*?)
 - often true across languages
- Polysemy: one word with multiple related senses
- Homonymy: different words that happen to share the same word form

Chapter 5

Etymological fallacy

- You know when someone looks up a word's history to find out what it “really” means?
- Here're some examples:

20 Commonly Misused Words That Will Make You Rethink Everything

These are **literally** some of the trickiest words in the english language.

BY [ADAM SCHUBAK](#) Sep 30, 2021

From *Good Housekeeping*.

Literally

This is a popular one. Literally should be used when the words that follow truly happened. If you **literally** died reading that, you would be dead.

Nauseous

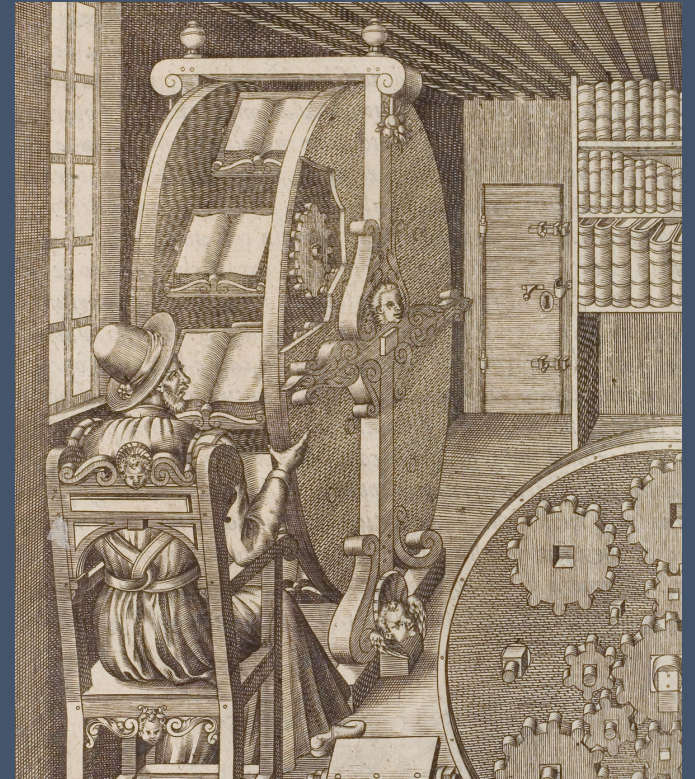
If you're experiencing nausea, you're nauseated. If you're nauseous, it means you cause nausea.

Decimate

You've probably heard decimate used in the context of something getting destroyed. Put that out of your mind. The true definition is to reduce something by one tenth.

Etymological fallacy

- When someone looks up a word's history to find out what it “really” means, they're wrong.
- They're falling for the **etymological fallacy**.
- Words mean what they're used to mean now.
- See e.g. almost any curse word.
- Most linguistic analysis is *synchronic*, rather than *diachronic*.
- Synchronic – at any given time (usually the present)
- Diachronic – across time



Systematic polysemy

- What's polysemy?

“one word with multiple senses” (89)

- What's homonymy?

“different words that happen to sound the same” (89)

- The different senses of a polysemous word all fall under a single lexical entry.
- Different instances of a homonym are listed separately.
- What is regular or systematic polysemy?

“Systematic polysemy involves senses which are related in recurring or predictable ways.” (91)



Polysemy:
I write using a *pen*.
I shall *pen* a letter.

Homonymy:
I write using a *pen*.
I keep the pigs in a *pen*.

Systematic polysemy

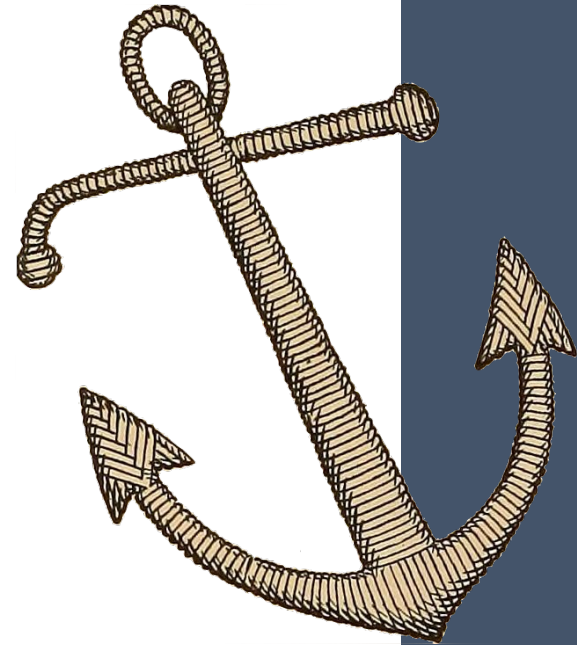
“For example, many verbs which denote a change of state (*break*, *melt*, *split*, etc.) have two senses, one transitive (V_{tr}) and the other intransitive (V_{intr}), with V_{tr} meaning roughly ‘cause to V_{intr} ’.” (91)



- What're some example sentences using *break*, *melt*, and *split* as a transitive verb?
- What're some sentences using *break*, *melt*, and *split* as an intransitive verb?
- What're some other verbs that show this same systematic polysemy?

Systematic polysemy

“Similarly, many nouns that refer to things used as instruments (*hammer, saw, paddle, whip, brush, comb, rake, shovel, plow, sandpaper, anchor, tape, chain, telephone, etc.*) can also be used as verbs meaning roughly ‘to use the instrument to act on an appropriate object.’” (91)



- Note that each sense can have only one lexical class, e.g. noun, verb, adjective, etc. Any word that can be used as both a noun and a verb (for example) must have at least two senses. (Hint: This is a great way to come up with examples of polysemous words.)
- What're some sentences using the above words as both a noun and a verb?
- What're some similar words this **doesn't** work for?

Sense and disambiguation

- Many, many words are polysemous.
- Speakers usually intend upon only a single sense.
- Hearers are usually able to pick up on the intended sense.
- We do this automatically and, usually, immediately.

“Several rare ferns grow on the steep banks of the burn where it runs into the lake.” (93)

- *burn* is polysemous; one meaning is ‘a small stream’ (Scottish English)
- 4 more words here are polysemous. What are they?

“Of course,” Mrs. Roby admitted, “the difficulty is that one must give up so much time to it. It’s very *long*.”

“I can’t imagine,” said Miss Van Vluyck tartly, “grudging the time given to such a subject.”

“And *deep* in places,” Mrs. Roby pursued; (so then it was a book!) “And it isn’t easy to *skip*.”

“I never skip,” said Mrs. Plinth dogmatically.

“Ah, it’s dangerous to, in Xingu. Even at the start there are places where one can’t. One must just *wade* through.”

“I should hardly call it wading,” said Mrs. Ballinger sarcastically.

Mrs. Roby sent her a look of interest. “Ah — you always found it went *swimmingly*?”

Mrs. Ballinger hesitated. “Of course there are difficult *passages*,” she conceded modestly.

“Yes; some are not at all *clear* — even,” Mrs. Roby added, “if one is familiar with the *original*.²⁵”

“As I suppose you are?” Osric Dane interposed, suddenly fixing her with a look of challenge.

Mrs. Roby met it by a deprecating smile. “Oh, it’s really not difficult up to a certain point; though some of the *branches* are very little known, and it’s almost impossible to get at the *source*.”

Polysemous words are italicized.

What is Mrs. Roby describing?

What do the others believe she is describing?

Figurative senses

“Several common patterns of extended meaning were identified and named by ancient Greek philosophers; these are often referred to as tropes, or ‘figures of speech’.” (98)

Some well-known tropes

Metaphor: Traditionally defined as a figure of speech in which an implied comparison is made between two unlike things; but see comments below.

Hyperbole: A figure of speech in which exaggeration is used for emphasis or effect; an extravagant statement. (e.g., *I have eaten more salt than you have eaten rice.* — Chinese saying implying seniority in age and wisdom)

What’s an example of each one?

Euphemism: Substitution of an inoffensive term (such as *passed away*) for one considered offensively explicit (*died*).

Metonymy: A figure of speech in which one word or phrase is substituted for another with which it is closely associated (such as *crown* for *monarch*).

Synecdoche (/sɪˈnɛk də ki/): A figure of speech in which a part is used to represent the whole, the whole for a part, the specific for the general, the general for the specific, or the material for the thing made from it. Considered by some to be a form of metonymy.

Litotes: A figure of speech consisting of an understatement in which an affirmative is expressed by negating its opposite (e.g. *not bad* to mean ‘good’).

Irony: A figure of speech in which the intended meaning of the expression is the opposite of its literal meaning.

Practice! (p.104, q.C)

Identify the type of figure illustrated by the italicized words in the following passages:

metaphor
hyperbole
euphemism
metonymy (closely associated)
synecdoche (part for whole)
litotes (understatement)
irony

Fear is the *lock* and laughter the *key* to your heart.

The *White House* is concerned about terrorism.

She has six hungry *mouths* to feed.

That joke is *as old as the hills*.

It's *not the prettiest* quarter I've seen, Mr. Liddell.

As *pleasant and relaxed* as a coiled rattlesnake.

Headline: Korean "*comfort women*" get controversial apology, compensation from Japanese government

Practice! (p.104, q.D)

Identify the figures of speech that provided the source for the following historical shifts in word meaning:

metaphor
hyperbole
euphemism
metonymy (closely associated)
synecdoche (part for whole)
litotes (understatement)
irony

glossa (Greek) 'tongue; language'

pastor

drumstick (for 'turkey leg')

pioneer (< Old French *peon(ier)* 'foot-soldier'; cognate: *pawn*)

bead (< 'prayer')

Practice!

(p.105–106, q.C)

How would you describe the relationship between the readings of the italicized words in the following pairs? Choose from POLYSEMY, HOMONYMY, VAGUENESS, INDETERMINACY, FIGURATIVE USE.

If none seem appropriate, describe the sense in prose.

Mary ordered an *omelette*.
The *omelette* at table 6 wants his coffee now.

They *led* the prisoner away.
They *led* him to believe that he would be freed.

King George III was not very *intelligent* and could not read until he was 11.
The squid is actually quite *intelligent*, for an invertebrate.

My *cousin* married an actress.
My *cousin* married a policeman.

Could you loan me your *pen*? Mine's out of ink.
The goats escaped from their *pen* and ate my artichokes.

Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is too *deep* for me.
This river is too *deep* for my Land Rover to ford.

For next week...

- Read chapter 6.
- The midterm will be sent out this weekend and due next week.

Midterm Review

We'll take a 10-minute break now. Use this time to think of some topics we've covered so far that you'd like some help with.

Midterm

- Covers everything from the start of the semester through this week.
- Review your writing assignments and quizzes as well as the slides to help you prepare.
- Graded out of 10 points.
- There will be more questions than you need to answer.
- Some multiple choice, some short answer.
- Open book, but no collaborating or using AI.