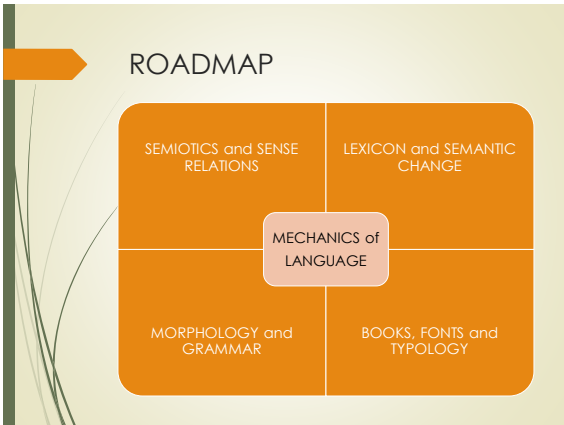


Making Sense

The Mechanics of the English Language



WHAT IS A LANGUAGE?

- Exclusively human** but also not;

 - The system of spoken or written communication used by a particular country, people, community, etc., typically consisting of words used within a regular grammatical and syntactic structure; (also) a formal system of communication by gesture, esp. as used by the deaf (def. 1a)
- Formal** but also not;

 - b. The vocal sounds by which mammals and birds communicate; (in extended use) any other signals used by animals to communicate (def. 1b)
- Verbal** but also not;

 - c. An unsystematic or informal means of communicating other than by the use of words, as gesture, facial expression, etc.; non-verbal communication (def. 1c)
- Particular** but also not

 - The method of human communication, usually spoken or written (but also including sign language), consisting of the use of words (or gestures) in a structured and conventional way; (also) words. (def. 6)

From Dr. Owen: ELEMENTS OF A LANGUAGE

- PHONOLOGY: system of sounds associated with meaning (Cherology: system of hand positions etc.)
- SYNTAX: system that regulates the position of words relative to meaning
- MORPHOLOGY: system that regulates the structure of words and their relationship to each other in terms of grammar
- PRAGMATICS: system of rules (largely implicit) that govern the use of language in social contexts
- KEY ELEMENT: SYSTEM THAT COMMUNICATES MEANING

SEMIOTICS

SEMIOTICS (aka SEMIOLOGY)

OED:

2. The science of communication studied through the interpretation of signs and symbols as they operate in various fields, esp. language

"investigates the structure of all possible **sign systems**, and the role these play in the way we **create** and **perceive patterns** (or 'meanings') in **sociocultural behaviour**" (CEL 403)

(WEIRD SIDEBAR: Semiotics also means "The branch of medical science which is concerned with symptoms" (OED def. 1)

SEMANTICS

OED

The branch of linguistics or philosophy concerned with meaning in language; the study or analysis of meaning in words, sentences, etc. (def. 2a)

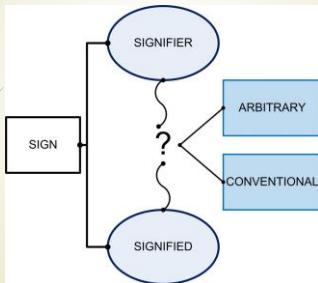
Chiefly *depreciative*. The use of words with particular meanings, esp. for euphemistic or tendentious purposes. Also: (the act of making) pedantic distinctions regarding the precise or technical meaning of words; verbal quibbling. (def. 2b)

SOME KEY PEOPLE

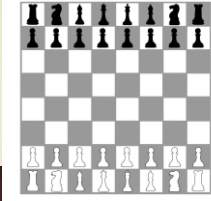
- ▶ **AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO** (*On Christian Teaching*, c. 400 CE)
 - ▶ The sign
- ▶ **FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE** (*Course in General Linguistics*, c. 1911): Structuralism
 - ▶ *Langue* and *parole*
- ▶ **JACQUES DERRIDA** (*Of Grammatology*, 1967): Post-Structuralism
 - ▶ Deconstruction, *différance*
- ▶ **J.L. AUSTIN** (*How To Do Things With Words*, 1975)
 - ▶ Speech acts

10

THE SIGN: AUGUSTINE

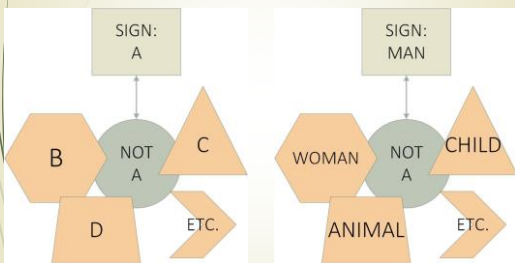


STRUCTURALISM: de Saussure



- LANGUE: abstract principles of language that govern its structure and ways of making meaning
 - The sign, sense relations etc.
 - RULES OF THE GAME
- PAROLE: individual uses of language for communication
 - The statements on this slide
 - MOVES IN THE GAME

DIFFÉRENCE: DERRIDA



PRAGMATICS: AUSTIN

- the study of language use within social context
- Links the **social** to the **structural**

LOCUTION (what is said: grammar, syntax, semantics)




ILLOCUTION (what the utterance **does** in a particular context)

How would you respond to the following question?

Do you know what time it is?


A: Yes, I do.

A: Yes. It's 2 PM.



CONTEXT


"Decontextualized language study is less messy, but it's also irrelevant. People always speak within specific cultural contexts that relate to their choices and intentions to issues of politics and power"
(Beyond Grammar, 23)



CONTEXTS OF UTTERANCES

- Two men are taken into custody after a fight at a local pub and are being questioned by police:

- I didn't do nothin' wrong and I ain't gonna tell you shit. Get me a lawyer.
- I did not participate in the incident and I am within my rights not to speak to you. I would like to request legal representation at this time.



SENSE RELATIONS

BEWARE!

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
 All mimsy were the borogoves,
 And the mome raths outgrabe.
 (*Jabberwocky*, C.S. Lewis)

WE KNOW IT, BUT DO WE KNOW KNOW IT?

The lottery winner kicked up her elbows.
 (collocation)
I have a pet and it is a dog and a monkey.
 (2 hypernyms of the same hyponym)
In the race he came in first and last.
 (complementary antonyms)
 How can a sentence be **GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT** but not make **SENSE**?

SENSE RELATIONS

Rules or conventions that govern the interaction of lexemes in terms of their **meaning** (semantics) and **sequence** (syntax)

COLLOCATION

- The way that lexemes will "anticipate" other lexemes in a sentence
- May be "weak," "strong" or "faulty."

EG: complete these statements:

I writhed in excruciating...

He was glad he decided to take...

EG: "The key to his destiny sang in his heart."

ANTIMONY and SYNONYMY

ANTIMONY

- a relationship between words with OPPOSITE meaning:
 - GRADABLE: related to place in a spectrum:
 - wet/dry; rich/poor
 - COMPLEMENTARY: mutual exclusion:
 - first/last; tall/short
 - CONVERSE: mutual dependency
 - wife/husband; buy/sell

SYNONYMY

- a relation between words of SIMILAR but QUALIFIED meaning:
 - STYLE:
 - mentally ill/wacko; mutton/lamb
 - COLLOCATION:
 - rancid/rotten butter is "rancid" but an apple is "rotten"

HYPERNYMY

- The relationship between words in terms of SPECIFICITY and GENERALITY



What is the HYPERNYM for each of these HYPONYMS?

- Interesting
- Sound
- Incompatible

SYNTAGMATIC and PARADIGMATIC RELATIONS

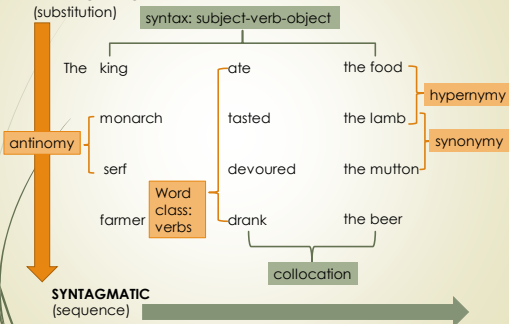
SYNTAGMATIC: the relationship between words in terms of their SEQUENCE in grammatical units (SYNTAX);

- Subject—verb—object
- Collocation

PARADIGMATIC: the relationship between words in terms of MEANING and FUNCTION:

- Can SUBSTITUTE for each other
- Synonyms, antonyms, hyponyms, word class (noun, verb etc.)

PARADIGMATIC (substitution)



When bad things happen to good sentences

- Drunk gets nine months in violin case.
- Iraqi head seeks arms.
- British left waffles on Falkland Islands.
- Eye drops off shelf.
- Enraged cow injures farmer with axe.
- Miners refuse to work after death.
- Stolen painting found by tree.
- Two sisters reunited after 18 years in checkout line.
- Red tape holding up bridges.
- Local highschool drop-outs cut in half.
- Hospitals sued by seven foot doctors.

Examples courtesy of *Anguished English: An Anthology of Accidental Assaults Upon the English Language* by Richard Lederer
