シマンティクス（意味論）：言葉と意味

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概　略

　言葉の目的とは何か。人々が互いに接するとき何が彼らの発言を重要または意味あるものにするのか。言葉は話したり、書いたりするという人間らしい言語能力である。言語なしでは人間は動物と同様かもしれない。言語は人間独特の基本であり、文化の本質である。どのようにその意義あるものが恣意的な象徴の単なる発言やなぐり書きにつながるのであろうか。言語は人間の意識に不可欠な窓である。２人もしくはそれ以上の人間が談話に従事するときは、彼らの意識や経験の様子を実在的世界と関連がある方法で伝えているのである。この方法でのコミュニケーションは、実在的世界を表す音韻体系の記号にメッセージをコード化する必要がある。この工程とコードを意味あるものにさせるのは、聞き手が同類の認識システム（頭語法・自然の法則他）の読解力を使用し、コードを意味ある文脈にさせるよう見極めることである。コミュニケーションとは、「A」という源から「B」という対象へ情報を伝達するという事である。コミュニケーションとは意識「A」は何を伝えたのか、もしくは意識「B」に何が伝わったのかを理解する場合のみ生ずる事である。

　また、個人的な価値と解釈が影響するという要素は、コミュニケーションとシマンティクス（意味論）の領域において不可欠な事であり、学術的に認められる唯一の方法は、言語の使用もしくは誤用といったものによって生じるのではなく、伝達システムを全体的なものとして研究することによってであろう。シマンティクスの意とするものは、話し手の意思と聞き手の意思が中立という事である。コミュニケーション自体を媒体として、中立的な潜在性を理解する事によってのみ、その人が伝えようとしている事と実際に伝えている事の相違を調査することができるのである。

Semantics: Words and Meaning

By Andrew Reimann

What is the purpose of language? When people communicate what is it about their speech that makes it important or meaningful? As defined by Oxford, "Language is human speech either spoken or written: The ability to communicate and express abstract thoughts and concepts in an organized, logical or creative manner regarding ideas within or outside of our immediate environment, distinguishes homo sapiens from all other species on earth. Language is the basis of man's uniqueness, and the essence of his culture."[1] How are so much meaning and significance linked to the mere utterance or scribbling of arbitrary symbols. Language is essentially a window into the consciousness of humans. When two or more people are engaged in a form of discourse they are communicating aspects of their consciousness

and experience in a way that is relevant to the real world. Communication in this way involves the encoding of messages into phonological symbols that represent the real world. What makes this process and the symbols involved meaningful is that listeners can decode them using their understanding of similar cognitive systems (syntax, laws of nature, etc.) to place them in a relevant context that provides meaning.[2] According to G. Leech, "Semantics", "Communication means the transfer of information from a source "A" to a target "B". ...communication has only taken place if we know that what was in mind "A" has been transferred to, or copied in, mind "B"."[3]
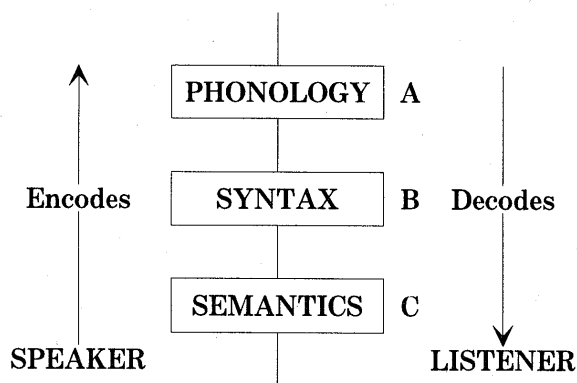
The above diagram[4] shows how communication is divided into three levels of representation, and how they must be categorized to provide a transfer of meaning. The speaker starts with an idea that has semantic value and breaks it down (encodes) through syntactic rules into phonetic symbols. The listener receives these phonetic symbols and interprets them (decodes) using syntactic and conceptual knowledge to form a personal understanding of the speaker's idea. However, since people's views of the world are highly subjective, these transfers are not always completed or processed successfully. What a speaker intended to communicate is not necessarily what the listener interpreted.[5] It is this complex aspect of communication that causes much difficulty and has brought the focus of modern Psycho

Linguistics toward the study of Semantics; the study of symbols and conditions that may be meaningful.[6]

Although the questions of meaning have troubled linguists for as long as language has existed, it has only been recently (in the later half of the twentieth century) that the study of Semantics itself has developed. Noam Chomsky through his revolutionary book "Syntactic Structures" and theory of Transformational Generative Grammar "unintentionally" spearheaded this movement. Although Chomsky's theory dealt chiefly with questions of syntax, it advocated re-evaluations of theories of grammar, and inquiries into the origin of meaning. It was proposed, that although the relationship between Syntax and Semantics was inseparable, and that without syntactic organization their could be no semantic meaning, the study of semantics was central to the understanding of language and consciousness.[7] In the process of deriving meaning from human speech, the role of syntax was only one element among many required cognitive systems.[8]

Chomsky's Standard Theory, the second phase of Transformational Generative Grammar, explains how syntax and semantics are integrated at the level of deep structure but that the grammatical relationship to meaning does not always exist.[9]

The following sentences are syntactically different but semantically provide the same meaning.

The boy hit the ball.
The ball was hit by the boy.

Rules of syntax are not crucial for the understanding of these two sentences. The fact that one sentence is active and the other is passive does not affect the basic meaning of either sentence. Even when there are no rules of grammar present it is often still possible to obtain meaning from speech by the utilization of conceptual knowledge and other cognitive systems.[10]

Boy throw ball.

Boy ball throw.

Throw boy ball.

These three sentences, though arguably ungrammatical, can still qualify as meaningful because they follow rules of, and are relevant to, the real world. Here a basic understanding of vocabulary is all that is required to make sense of the sentence. In this case the agent/patient relationship is obvious because of what we know of the words boy and ball, and the experience we have of them in the real world. Furthermore, Chomsky shows how a sentence can be syntactically correct and still devoid of any meaning.[11]

"Colourless green ideas sleep furiously."

Though grammatical, this sentence is semantically incorrect, as it does not adhere to any rules of the real world. There is a proper subject verb object agreement, but the subject and object have no relevance to each other nor do they combine to form any meaningful claim about the outside world. Thus this sentence is only internally true, externally, it is false. Internal and external truth, is the compliance of a semantic interpretation with either linguistic or real world rules respectively.[12] Semantic (external) considerations are essential for a linguistic theory, one cannot separate semantic representation from belief and knowledge of the real world. Nothing can be meaningful if it is only internally true.[13]

Semantic truth in a sentence depends on context and extra linguistic knowledge. When we use a symbol to describe an object, we do so only because we have knowledge and experience of that object. Our mind forms a three dimensional expectation of a word that remains consistent allowing us to refer to a particular object through the use of that word or symbol.[14] In order for Semantics to be studied inter

linguistically and not as something outside language, a distinction has to be made between knowledge of language and knowledge of the real world. Consider the following two sentences:

1) My uncle always sleeps on one toe.

2) My uncle always sleeps awake.

Both sentences are semantically unacceptable. Sentence number one is externally false because other than as a metaphor the statement; "sleeps on one toe" is physically impossible in the real world. Sentence two is internally false by definition, sleep and awake are states that can not occur together. Although sentence two is also externally false one requires no knowledge of the real world to establish this. In this case linguistic knowledge alone is sufficient to understand the contradiction. A statement is true or false either by reason of experience or by reason of what the statement itself means.[15]

Meaning and semantic truth are determined by a variety of other factors. We have examined the role that conceptual knowledge plays in the communicative process, now lets have a look at some of the other elements that effect meaning.

"Connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content."[16] Connotations are incidental to language not essential to it, they are very unstable compared to conceptual knowledge and vary from age to age and society to society. A hundred years ago "non trouser wearing" would have been a definitive connotation of the word "woman". Connotations include idioms and other expressions that depend on personal or limited (group/societal) experience, rather than general experience of the real world. Not all speakers of a certain language speak the same language. They share the same rules of syntax and conceptual framework but the other

aspects of their communicative abilities are subjective and "open ended".[17]

"Social meaning is that which a piece of language conveys about the social circumstances of its use."[18] Factors like dialect, tone, style, or choice of words (slang, colloquialisms, etc.) change the communicative value of a sentence, contributing additional meaning (apart from what the utterance itself means) such as geographical or social origin of the speaker, the relationship between the speaker and hearer, and the nature of the utterance itself. If a speaker uses the word **residence, abode, home or pad** to describe the place where they live, the conceptual meanings are synonymous but contextually they offer different meanings. Also the tone in which a speaker presents an utterance, for example;

I am thirsty. → May I have some water?

I am thirsty. → Statement of fact.

I am thirsty. → Let's go for a drink.

I am thirsty! → Get me some water!

affects whether it is interpreted as a request, assertion, command or even a question.[19]

A branch of Social meaning is Affective meaning. "This type of meaning reflects the personal feelings or attitude of the speaker towards the listener or his subject."[20] This is achieved mainly through, changes in intonation and voice timbre and the use of interjections (hurrah or oh). If a speaker says:

Nice to meet you.

in a casual unenthusiastic tone of voice or

I hate this yahoo!

It is clear that his attitude betrays the conceptual value of the utterance and that there is an element of sarcasm or other form of contextual meaning implied.

"Reflected meaning occurs at the lexical level, and is the form of meaning which arises in cases of multiple conceptual meaning, when one sense of a word forms part of our response to another sense."[21] This is usually caused when frequency or familiarity with one sense of a word affects our interpretation of another sense. This is common with words that have sexual connotations. An example from Bloomfield explains how the farmyard use of the word **cock** was replaced by the word **rooster**, as a result of the increasing use of the latter's slang connotation.[22]

"Collocative meaning consists of the associations a word acquires on account of the meanings of words that tend to occur in its environment."[23] The adjectives **pretty and handsome** both suggest the same meaning; good looking. However, if they are applied in uncommon contexts such as;

The pretty man.

The handsome woman.

the conceptual meaning remains, but a different type of attractiveness is implied. It should be noted that "Collocative meaning is simply an idiosyncratic property of individual words and that this type of classifying meaning is only useful if no other categories apply."[24]

All of the above classifications of meaning fall into the same category of Associative Meaning. They are all open ended and subjective basing their analysis on variable scales rather than on a true or false system. This feature is particularly useful for psychological studies or studies where individual differences are important because unlike conceptual meaning where analysis is based on a common system, Associative meaning varies with individual experience."[25]

The last form of meaning we will examine is Thematic Meaning. This type of meaning involves "what is communicated by the way in which the speaker or writer organizes the message, in terms of ordering, focus or emphasis."[26] Two sentences, one in the active the other in the passive state, have the same conceptual meaning but their communicative values are different, they are not each equally appropriate in the same context.

Beth bought lunch.

Lunch was bought by Beth.

In the first sentence (active) the emphasis is placed on **Beth** answering the question, who? In the second sentence the emphasis is placed on **lunch** answering the question, what? This variation in subject and object affects what the listener perceives as the focus or important element of an utterance and thus effects the overall meaning. This can also be done by the use of contrastive stress and intonation. The use of different lexical means, interchanging verbs such as **owns** for **belongs to**, to denote possession can also change meaning."[27]

1. CONCEPTUAL MEANING or *Sense*		Logical, cognitive, or denotative content.
ASSOCIATIVE MEANING	2. CONNOTATIVE MEANING	What is communicated by virtue of what language refers to.
	3. SOCIAL MEANING	What is communicated of the social circumstances of language use.
	4. AFFECTIVE MEANING	What is communicated of the feelings and attitudes of the speaker/writer.
	5. REFLECTED MEANING	What is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression.
	6. COLLOCATIVE MEANING	What is communicated through association with words which tend to occur in the environment of another word.
7. THEMATIC MEANING		What is communicated by the way in which the message is organized in terms of order and emphasis.

Having examined how meaning is created and the factors that affect its quality, it should be easy to see how much difficulty and confusion arise in its production and comprehension. Questions of semantic competence and efficient communication of ideas, is the chief concern in language and lingustics.[28] People are constantly misinterpreting and creating ambiguities. The major problems and conflicts of the world can, in one way or another, be attributed to language differences and a form of miscommunication. If this is the case, why has not a more efficient form of expression evolved, one where ambiguity and misunderstanding do not occur? To do this one must first establish what

aspect of language makes it so confusing.

According to Jonathan Swift it is words that create the problems in communication. In his essay ***Eliminating Words*** from his novel ***Gulliver's Travels***, Swift looks at language and considers eliminating all unnecessary words. Since nouns are the only imaginable words he decides that all verbs, adjectives and prepositions, etc. should be removed from language. He concludes that "words are only names for things" and "an irritating and misleading nuisance". Swift proposes that they be abolished altogether and that "men should carry about them such things as were necessary to express a particular business they are to discourse on," Not only would this simplify and liberate speech from ambiguity it would also "serve as a universal language to be understood in all civilized nations."[29]

Like Swift, George Orwell in his novel "***1984***" proposes, through the concept of "Newspeak" maximizing the efficiency of language by eliminating certain unnecessary words. In this situation the motive is geared more towards political attempts of thought control than towards the elimination of ambiguity. If an adequate representation of an object does not exist as a linguistic symbol, there is no way to conceptualize that object or idea, let alone communicate it.[30]

Lewis Carol in his poem "***Jabberwocky***" shows how the actual concrete symbol or word for an object is not as important as the context in which it is used.

"'Twas brillig, and the slyhy toves

Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:

All mimsy were the borogroves,

And the mome raths outgrabe."[31]

It is possible to interpret the general meaning of the above, unfamiliar contentives, simply by observing how they are used, analyzing the context and applying basic rules of syntax. "**slythy toves**" and **smooth badgers** are both just linguistic representations of a real world object, their actual meaning is not necessary to

understand the basic nature of the utterance. Although this method is quite possible it can never give an accurate definition or account of the meaning of an utterance, much beyond determining the agent and patient and any subsequent relationship.[32]

We have seen how the processes of communication and semantic interpretation depend on many factors and can become very complex. The elements that are involved in the creation of meaning are as infinite and diverse as the boundaries of language itself Thus the understanding of Semantics is one of the most difficult tasks in the study of linguistics and cognitive science. Semantics is essentially "Cognition turning in upon itself an activity which may seem to have much in common with a dog chasing its own tail."[33] Nonetheless, Semantics is crucial to the understanding of language and communication, the investigation of human knowledge and cognition and the answering of such philosophical questions as; How we know what we know? and Why we think the way we do?

Although the factors that affect personal meaning and interpretation are an integral part of Semantics, the only way it will ever become an understood science is by studying the communicative system as a whole and not what kind of use or misuse is made of it.[34] "Meaning, for Semantics is neutral between speakers meaning and hearers meaning, only through knowing the neutral potentialities of the medium of communication itself can we investigate differences between what a person intends to convey and what he actually conveys."[35]

Notes

[1] Oxford Dictionary definition of; Language.

[2] Leech, G. 1987. Semantics : The Study of Meaning. Penguin Books Ltd., Middlessex, England.

[3] Leech, G., p. 22

[4] Leech, G., p. 11

[5] Leech, G., p. 22

[6] Chomsky, Noam 1979. Language and Responsibility. Pantheon Books, New York.

[7] Chomsky p. 13 6, 13 8

[8] Chomsky, p. 147

[9] Chomsky, p. 136

[10] Leech, P. 10

[11] Chomsky, p. 138

[12] Chomsky, P. 1143

[13] Leech, G., p. 179

[14] Chomsky, p. 1,43

[15] Leech, G., p. 7

[16] Leech, G., p. 12

[17] Leech, G., p. 13

[18] Leech, G., p. 14

[19] Leech, G., p. 15

[20] Leech, G., p. 15

[21] Leech, G., p. 16

[22] Leech, G., p. 17

[23] Leech, G., p. 17

[24] Leech, G., p. 17

[25] Leech, G., p. 19

[26] Leech, G., p. 20

[27] Leech, G., p. 21

[28] Leech, G., p. 174

[29] Swift, Jonathan. 1725. Gulliver's Travels: Eliminating Words

[30] Orwell, George. 1949. 1984

[31] Carol, Lewis. 1865. Jabberwocky

[32] Livingston, Myra Cohn. 1973. The Poems of Lewis Carol. T. Y. Crowell Company, New York.

[33] Leech, G., p. 1

[34] Leech, G., p. 22

[35] Leech, G., p. 22

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Abstract

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