



Valentina Gavranović

TOWARDS A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF MEANING IN LANGUAGE

A COURSEBOOK IN ENGLISH SEMANTICS



The University of Singidunum
Belgrade

Valentina Gavranović

**TOWARDS A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF
MEANING IN LANGUAGE**

A COURSEBOOK IN ENGLISH SEMANTICS

1ST EDITION

Belgrade, 2020.

A COURSEBOOK IN ENGLISH SEMANTICS

A COURSEBOOK IN ENGLISH SEMANTICS

Author:

Valentina Gavranović

Publisher:

SINGIDUNUM UNIVERSITY

32 Danijelova Street, Begrade

www.singidunum.ac.rs

For publisher:

Milovan Stanišić, PhD

Prepress:

Miloš Višnjic

Design:

Aleksandar Mihajlović

Year:

2020.

Printed by:

Birograf, Belgrade

Copyright © 2020 Singidunum University, Belgrade

All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced, transmitted, stored or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including but not limited to photocopying, recording, scanning, digitizing, taping, Web distribution, information networks, or information storage and retrieval systems, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Images and Videos on Pixabay are released under Creative Commons CC0. To the extent possible under law, uploaders of Pixabay have waived their copyright and related or neighboring rights to these Images and Videos. You are free to adapt and use them for commercial purposes without attributing the original author or source. Although not required, a link back to Pixabay is appreciated.

CONTENTS



PREFACE	V
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING SEMANTICS	3
1.1. Introduction	3
1.2. Semantics and other disciplines	3
1.2.1. Semiotics and semantics	4
1.3. The study of meaning throughout history	4
1.4. Basic terms and concepts in semantics - an overview	5
1.4.1. The meanings of meaning	7
1.4.2. Different types of meaning	8
1.4.2.1. Additional remarks on meaning	9
1.4.3 Componential analysis	10
Chapter 1: Questions to discuss and exercises	12
Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background	12
Part 2. Application of theory	12
CHAPTER 2: LEXICAL SEMANTICS	15
2.1. Lexical semantics – introductory notes	15
2.2. Semantic characteristics of individual words	15
2.2.1. Polysemy	15
2.2.2. Change of meaning	16
2.2.2.1. Semantic narrowing	16
2.2.2.2. Semantic widening	17
2.2.2.3. Metaphor	17
2.2.2.4. Metonymy	17
2.2.2.5. Synecdoche	17
2.2.2.6. Hyperbole and Litotes	17
2.2.2.7. Degeneration	18
2.2.2.8. Elevation	18
2.2.2.9. The Shift in Meaning	18
2.2.2.10. Borrowing and the change of meaning	18
2.3. Semantic relations between words	18
2.3.1 Homonymy	19
2.3.2. Synonymy – introductory notes	19
2.3.2.1. Definitions of synonymy	19
2.3.2.2. The complex nature of synonymy	20
2.3.2.3. The types of synonyms	20
2.3.2.3.1. Total or absolute synonymy	20
2.3.2.3.2. Cognitive or propositional synonymy	21
2.3.2.3.3. Near-synonymy	21
2.3.2.4. Other characteristics of synonymy	21

2.3.3. Oppositeness	22
2.3.3.1. Complementary antonyms	23
2.3.3.2. Relational antonyms	23
2.3.3.3. Graded antonyms	23
2.3.4. Hierarchical Lexical Semantic Relations	23
2.3.4.1. Hyponymy	24
2.3.4.2. Meronymy	25
2.3.4.3. Taxonomy	26
Chapter 2: Lexical Semantics: Questions to discuss and exercises	27
Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background	27
Topic 1: Semantic characteristics of individual words	27
Topic 2: Semantic relations between words	27
Part 2. Application of theory	27
Topic 1: Semantic characteristics of individual words	27
Topic 2: Semantic relations between words	28
CHAPTER 3: SYNTAGMATIC SEMANTIC RELATIONS	31
3.1. Paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations – introductory notes	31
3.2. Collocations	31
3.3. Idioms	31
3.4. Some borderline cases	35
Chapter 3: Questions to discuss and exercises	36
Topic: Syntagmatic semantic relations	36
Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background	36
Part 2. Application of theory	36
CHAPTER 4: SENTENCE SEMANTICS	39
4.1. Sentence semantics – introductory notes	39
4.2. The notion of proposition	39
4.3. Arguments and predicates	40
4.4. The types of sentence meanings	40
4.5. Semantic relationship between sentences	41
Chapter 4: Questions to discuss and exercises	43
Topic: Sentence semantics	43
Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background	43
Part 2. Application of theory	43
CHAPTER 5: GRAMMATICAL MEANING	45
5.1. From Sound to Meaning – Closing remarks	45
5.1.1. Sounds and meaning	45
5.1.2. Grammatical semantics	46
Chapter 5: Questions to discuss and exercises	47
Topic: Grammatical Semantics	47
Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background	47
Part 2. Application of theory	47

CHAPTER 6: MEANING AND THE USE OF LANGUAGE	49
6.1. Beyond linguistic meaning – introductory notes	49
6.2. Pragmatics and semantics	49
6.3. Meaning and context	50
Chapter 6: Questions to discuss and exercises	54
Topic: Meaning and the use of language	54
Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background	54
Part 2. Application of theory	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY	56

Preface

This coursebook has been written for undergraduate students majoring in English, with the aim to introduce them with the main concepts found in the domain of semantics, and help them understand the complexities and different aspects of meaning in language. Although the book is primarily intended for students who have no previous theoretical knowledge in semantics, it can also be used by those who want to consolidate and expand on their existing learning experience in linguistics and semantics.

The scope of concepts and topics covered in this book have been framed within a rounded context which offers the basics in semantics, and provides references and incentives for students' further autonomous investigation and research. The author endeavoured to present complex linguistic issues in such a way that any language learner with no previous knowledge in this area can use the book. However, anyone who uses this book needs to read it very carefully so that they could understand the theory and apply it while tackling the examples illustrating the concepts provided in this book. Furthermore, the very nature of linguistics demands a thorough and careful reading, rereading and questioning.

The book is composed of six chapters, and, within them, there are several sections and subsections. Each chapter contains theoretical explanations followed by a set of questions and exercises whose aim is to help the learners revise the theoretical concepts and apply them in practice.

The focal part of this book deals with meanings of words, phrases and sentences from exclusively linguistic point of view, namely, the first part studies the phenomenon of meaning within lexical and sentence semantics. The first chapter is an introductory part, and it provides a general introduction to semantics - its place within linguistics and relation with other linguistic levels and scientific disciplines, and the development and status of semantics throughout history. The main concepts to be covered and the scope of this book are also outlined in the first chapter. It is followed by Chapter 2, containing several sections and subsections whose main focus is on lexical semantics and various semantic relations that exist within single words and among different words. These relations are described through syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, and the complexities these relations pose are also provided. The third and fourth chapter deal with meanings existing at the phrase, syntagm and sentence level, which is a domain of syntagm semantic relations and sentence semantics. The fifth chapter aims to correlate semantics to other language levels and illustrate their mutual interdependence. The last chapter of this book introduces the basics of pragmatics and the main concepts studied within a branch of linguistics which studies language and meaning in use, including not only the context wherein language is used, but also participants in this discourse. Although the scope of the chapter devoted to pragmatics is considerably smaller than the description of semantics and its various aspects given in the previous chapters, the main aim of introducing pragmatics in this coursebook is to illustrate the immense domain of the study of meaning and its complexities.

The overall aim of this coursebook is not only to introduce linguistic disciplines dealing with meanings and the amazing puzzles they create, but also to make students aware of meanings of words, phrases and sentences they come across in everyday life, outside a purely linguistic context.

And, finally, may this coursebook open new and exciting insights into meaning and encourage us all to be careful and smart participants in various communicative situations in a broader, real-world context.

INTRODUCING SEMANTICS

- ▶ introduction, main concepts, development, relation to other disciplines
- ▶ lexical semantics
- ▶ syntagmatic semantic relations
- ▶ sentence semantics
- ▶ grammatical semantics
- ▶ semantics and pragmatics

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCING SEMANTICS

1.1. INTRODUCTION

As a scientific discipline, **linguistics** includes different levels of language study – it is concerned with sounds, forms and meanings of linguistic units, as well as their relations. In terms of the level it studies, linguistics can be subdivided into a number of subfields – phonology, phonetics, morphology, syntax and semantics.

Semantics is a linguistic discipline generally defined as **a study of meaning**. The concept of “meaning” has provoked much debate and discussion not only among linguists, but the issue of the complexity of its precise definition can be traced back over 2000 years ago in the realm of philosophy. There is no general agreement among linguists what meaning in language should comprise and what the scope of it is. There are various approaches to the study of meaning in language which provide an abundant body of research and studies with a diversity of concepts defined within the umbrella term of semantics. Lyons (1996) makes distinction between semantics as a study of meaning in general, and **linguistic semantics** which studies meaning of vocabulary and grammar of language.

Semantics is considered to be a component or level of linguistics, and has an equal status as other linguistic disciplines. Generally speaking, semantics defines meanings of language units at different levels – it studies meanings of morphemes, words, phrases and sentences, and therefore, it is related to other linguistic levels, particularly morphology and syntax. Semantics is also closely related to another linguistic discipline – pragmatics – which studies language in use. There is a distinction between the meaning of a word, phrase or a sentence as an isolated unit, and the meaning they have when used in specific contexts and circumstances, or, in other words, the distinction between meaning and use.

The complexity of meaning and the wide scope it covers pose a rather challenging task to include all different aspects of meaning in a single coursebook, and provide a comprehensive description of all of them. This coursebook aims at being an introductory survey, and includes topics and concepts commonly discussed in semantics within a restricted framework of theoretical discussions and explanations.¹

1.2. SEMANTICS AND OTHER DISCIPLINES

Meaning is a subject of study concerning not only semantics and semanticists, but also other disciplines and scientists that approach this issue from different perspectives. Thus, relying on the same subject matter – meaning – semantics is related to other scientific disciplines such as philosophy, logic, anthropology, psychology, lexicography and etymology.

Semantics as a scientific linguistic discipline was first recognised as **historical semantics**, and the word semantics was first used to refer to the change of meaning in time. Historical semantics is closely related to **etymology**, the study of the origin of words and the development of their meaning.

Lexicography is a discipline which applies the techniques and principles described in **lexicology** for the purpose of compiling dictionaries. As such, it is concerned with the meaning of words, and, as a result of its endeavours, we can find accurate accounts of definitions and meanings as stated in dictionaries.

Even though the above mentioned disciplines have greatly contributed to the development of semantics, there are other scientific, but **non-linguistic fields**, which are also interested in the study of meaning. Although these disciplines have different aims and methodologies applied in the study of meaning, their findings and tenets are of great value for linguistic semantics.

¹ For a detailed description of linguistics and its disciplines, see Lyons (1981).

For a long time, before semantics was recognised as an independent linguistic discipline, meanings of words and sentences had been studied within philosophical and logical framework. Therefore, some scholars make distinction between **philosophical semantics** and **linguistic semantics**. Among the commonest concerns of philosophers pertaining to meaning was to understand the relationship between linguistic expressions and the external world they refer to. In the second half of the 20th century, philosophical concerns for meaning led to the development of **semiotics**, or **semiology**, which refers to the theory of signs. **Logic**, as a scientific discipline concerned with thinking and reasoning, is also related to semantics because it deals with meaning in a language system. Thus, the endeavours to study meaning within the framework of logic has led to the development of **logical semantics**. Semantics relies on logic, particularly in determining semantic relations within a sentence and using **the notion of truth**.

As a branch of anthropology, **linguistic anthropology** studies relations between language and society. Its main concern is to investigate how language is used in certain social and cultural contexts. In order to understand these contexts better, the study of meaning takes a significant role in linguistic anthropology. Within it, semantic domains are defined as specific domains that share a specific set of meanings. For example, if we want to understand the meaning of certain words used in these contexts, we need first to understand the cultural and social context where these words are used.

Another social science which can be related to semantics is psychology. **Psychology** is concerned with the meaning of words in communication - how it is affected by people participating in conversation and how meaning affects their thoughts and emotions.²

1.2.1. SEMIOTICS AND SEMANTICS

The term **semiotics**, or **semiology**, has been often used along the term semantics. Modern semiotics, as a discipline which studies signs, or signalling systems in general, is considered to have historically developed from semantics, and one of its founders was Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss linguist, who is considered to be the father of modern linguistics.

He used the term “semiology” to denote a field which focuses on the sign and the relationship between the **signifier** and the **signified**, which is arbitrary, since there is no justification in the real world to name something the way a language does it (Saussure, 2011).

Semiotics got its name in 1946, and, earlier, it was usually referred to as semantics. There are various terminological uses for semantics, semiotic and semiology. They depend on the historical period when they were used or referred to. Today, when semiotics is defined as an autonomous field of study, there is a clear distinction between semantics and semiotics. Semiotics studies signs within a context of communication, and unlike semantics, which includes only linguistic elements, semiotics comprises non-linguistic signs as well, such as gestures, signs, body language, and various signals. Some linguists consider semantics as a discipline belonging to both semiotics and linguistics.³

1.3. THE STUDY OF MEANING THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Although meaning has been much of a concern in etymology and lexicography for centuries, from a strictly linguistic point of view, semantics is a relatively young discipline. As it was described in the previous section, the endeavours to understand meaning are found in some non-linguistic fields, such as philosophy and logic. The works of the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato prove that this issue concerned great minds and provoked much discussion even in the ancient times. The main discussion revolved around the relationship between words and what they stand for.

The development of semantics as a linguistic discipline can be viewed through four main theoretical frameworks: prestructuralist, structuralist, generativist and cognitive.

Semantics as a term in linguistics was first introduced by a French philologist Micheal Bréal, who is thought to be the father of modern semantics. In his book *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning*, he used the term “*semantique*”, coined from the Greek *σημαντικός* *sēmantikós*, meaning “significant”. This book is considered to be a milestone in the study of meaning as an independent linguistic discipline, and also a detachment from historical linguistics (By then, meaning had been studied in terms of its development and change).

2 For a more detailed survey of disciplines which are related to semantics, see Palmer (1981).

3 Noth (1995), in his book *Handbook of Semiotics*, gives a thorough discussion on semiotics and its relation to semantics and other sign systems.

Although the term semantics was introduced in the English language through the paper 'Reflected meaning: a point in semantics' in 1894, it became widely used much later, with the book *The Meaning of meaning*, written by British linguists C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards (Palmer 1981: 1).

Semantics finally gained the true status of an independent linguistic discipline with the structuralists who started investigating meaning systematically, from a synchronic point of view, back in the 1930s. What characterised the shift in the study of meaning was establishing methodological basis of lexical semantics. It included semantic field analysis which later resulted in componential analysis. It was also in the period of structuralists that lexical relations (such as synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy) and syntactic relations were systematically identified, studied and defined.

The shift in linguistic research that was brought about in the 1960s with Chomsky and his transformational-generative approach to language study had an impact on the study of meaning. Lexical semantics was influenced by generative paradigm and its rigid approach to language description and 'mentalistic' theory of language, i.e., a concern for the speaker's creative competence. Katz and Fodor pioneered the study of meaning within generativist framework, adopting the structuralist approach and expanding it with the formal apparatus used in componential analysis. Further developments within generative framework, called 'neogenerativist' showed a shift in the study of meaning – from lexical towards sentential semantics.

The last two decades of the 20th century were characterised by the rise of cognitive linguistics, with George Lakoff (1987) and Ronald Langacker (1987, 1991) as the leading figures. Once again, the focus of semantics was reconsidered and redefined. And what concerned cognitive semantics most was the study of metaphor and metaphorical meanings.

All the above mentioned approaches contribute to a deeper understanding of meaning in language, and provide a comprehensive insight into the complexities of meaning and the different layers which overlap and influence each other. In this coursebook we will mainly refer to the structuralist and transformationalist theoretical framework, but none of these will be favoured or singled out as the leading school of thought in semantics. The approach in this coursebook is eclectic, and the study of meaning is approached from various angles and perspectives which greatly contribute to the description of lexical semantics.⁴

1.4. BASIC TERMS AND CONCEPTS IN SEMANTICS - AN OVERVIEW

The main interest of semantics lies in the concept of meaning. Semantics – or more specifically **linguistic semantics** – studies meaning of words, phrases and sentences.

Semantics can be subdivided into

- ▶ **lexical** and
- ▶ **sentential semantics**

The first is concerned with what a word means, and the latter studies meanings of phrases and sentences.

The study of meaning can also be approached from the perspective of a speaker, when we talk about **speaker meaning** - what a speaker intends to convey when using a language item. In order to understand language better, the following three elements need to be considered: **language**, **language users** (speakers and hearers) and the **world**. Their mutual and interdependent relationships can account for various complexities existing within the domain of the study of meaning. Thus, through the prism of these elements, many notions in semantics can be viewed and explained, and the main of these are described below.

⁴ Palmer (1981) gives a detailed survey of the development of semantics throughout history.

► Utterance, sentence and proposition

A very important distinction in semantics is made between **utterances** and **sentences**. An utterance is any use of language, be it a word, phrase, sentence, or a sequence of sentences, which can even be grammatically incomplete. It is a physical event performed by an individual on a particular occasion, separated by other utterances by silence. Unlike an utterance, a sentence can be considered as an abstract formation, a string of words combined together with the respect of grammatical rules of language.

In this coursebook we have adopted conventional distinction made in semantics between utterances and sentences. Namely, utterances will be written between quotation marks, and the sentences (as well as individual words and phrases) will be italicised. Semantics is concerned with both sentences and utterances. The following example illustrate the difference between utterance and sentence:

- (a) "I will do it later."
- (b) *I will do it later.*

The first example illustrates an utterance because it is spoken by someone, and this is indicated in writing by quotation marks. On the other hand, the second example represents a sentence, composed of elements which respect grammatical rules of the English language, and is not tied to any particular speech situation.

Closely related to utterances and sentences is the notion of **proposition**. In semantics, proposition is defined as a part of the meaning of an utterance which describes some idea or a fact about the world, be it true or false.

► Sense and reference

Other key concepts in semantics are **sense** and **reference**, the first referring to relationships inside language, and the latter to the relationship between a language and the world. It is important to introduce here the notion of the **referent** - an entity, a thing or a person in the world which the linguistic expression refers to. For example, the word *book* refers to the object in the real world made of sheets of paper.

Unlike reference, sense is defined linguistically, and it implies relations between linguistic expressions that exist within language. Sense is central to semantics, and although it represents an abstract notion, it is often present in the mind of a language user. If we understand what has been said or written, it means that we understand the sense of it.⁵

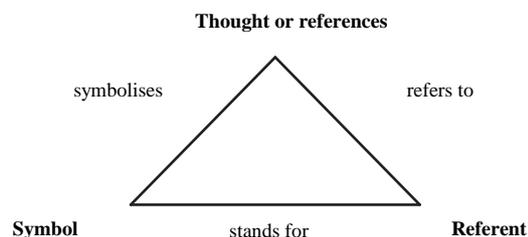
We talk about sense in relation to a system of semantic relationships with other linguistic expressions which can be not only single words, but also phrases and sentences. There are different semantic relationships, and they will be explained in detail in another chapter.

If we compare the two concepts and the words they refer to, we can say that there are words which have sense, but no referents in the real world. Such examples are words *almost*, *already*, *still*, *never*, and many others.

There are also words which differ in sense, but have the same reference, and vice versa, they have the same sense but different references. For example, the word *book* can have billions of referents, as there are billions of different books in this world. This example shows that the reference of a linguistic expression differs, depending on the circumstances (time, place, etc.) and the topic of conversation in which the expression is used. The classic example of two different linguistic expressions is the use of *the Morning Star* and *the Evening Star* to refer to the same referent - the planet *Venus* (Valenzuela, 2017: 84).

One of the basic concepts in semantics comprising the above mentioned components involved in meaning is named **the Semantic Triangle**, or **the triangle of reference**. It comprises **the object (referent)**, **the meaning of the object and the sign which expresses this object**. This relation can be shown as a triangle, as the diagram below shows.

5 For a detailed explanation of the key concepts found in semantics, see Bugarski (1996), and if the reader is interested in practical examples and illustrations of these concepts, see Hurford et al. (2007), who provide a considerable body of examples and exercises.



Although this idea was used earlier, Ogden and Richards were the first linguists who used this triangle in order to explain the key concepts involved in meaning, and today this concept is also known as “**Ogden/ Richards triangle**” (Lipka, 2002).

1.4.1. THE MEANINGS OF MEANING

The central concept of semantics relates to the term **meaning**. Meaning is one of the most obvious aspects of language, but, still, rather complex and often ambiguous and vague. The words *mean* and *meaning* are used so often in different contexts, any time we need the clarification of some concept, either in everyday life or in rather formal and scientific registers, and with different meanings and usages. The following examples illustrate different uses of the word *mean* and *meaning*, and are taken from Collins English Dictionary (1995).

meaning, noun

1. “the sense or significance of a word, sentence, symbol, etc.; import; semantic or lexical content”, e.g., *What is the meaning of (the word) “anxious”?*
2. “the purpose underlying or intended by speech, action, etc.”, e.g., *What is the meaning of the word “intention” in your speech?*
3. “the inner, symbolic, or true interpretation, value or message”, e.g., *We all wonder what the meaning of life is.*
4. “valid content; efficacy”, e.g., *We have many rules which do not have much meaning.*
5. “Philosophy. a. The sense of an expression; its connotation. b. The reference of an expression; its denotation.”

mean, verb

1. “to intend to convey or express”, e.g., *I did not mean to hurt you.*
2. “to denote or connote; to signify”, e.g., *What does this word mean in English?*
3. “to have the importance of”, e.g., *Your opinion means a lot to me.*
4. “to produce, cause”, e.g., *The latest environmental reforms will mean the reduction in fuel consumption.*

Apart from the above mentioned meanings which are closely related, whether used either as a noun or as a verb, the word **mean** has other, rather different meanings, which are quite unrelated. For example, as a noun, it can also mean: “the middle point, state”, “moderation”, or “average”. As an adjective, it has the following meanings: “miserly, ungenerous, or petty”, “humble, obscure, or lowly”, “despicable, ignoble”, “intermediate or medium in size, quantity, etc.” The word *mean* is also used in the idiom *no mean sth*, meaning “of high quality”, e.g., *My sister is no mean actress.*

These definitions show how meaning of words differ depending on different factors – parts of speech they belong to, and relations to other words and contexts. These examples also illustrate the interdependence of semantics and other linguistic levels. Although the word *meaning* has a number of distinct meanings, the most relevant use for language learners can be found in sentences such as *What does “ambiguity” mean?*⁶

⁶ For an extensive discussion on different types of meanings, see Lyons (1996).

1.4.2. DIFFERENT TYPES OF MEANING

Once the difference between sense and reference has been established, it is important to delineate the scope of lexical semantics. The focal area of lexical semantics is the study of **word meaning**. Words can have different aspects of meaning, and various relations in meanings between words can be established.

In terms of different aspects of word meanings, several types are usually distinguished and described in pairs.

a. Lexical and grammatical meanings

Lexical meaning refers to the meaning of a word as it is described in a dictionary. Collins Dictionary (1995) defines lexical meaning as “the meaning of a word in relation to the physical world or to abstract concepts, without reference to any sentence in which the word may occur.”

On the other hand, **grammatical meaning** describes a word in grammatical terms, namely by its function within a sentence.

Even though grammar and semantics are two distinct linguistic branches, they are closely related to each other, and the areas of their studies intersect. Apart from having lexical meaning, words are also characterised by grammatical meaning. Words belong to certain classes, and as members of these classes, they possess meaning which are characteristic for the classes they belong to, and, as such, they get into combinations with other words in longer stretches composed of words – such as phrases, syntagms, sentences and texts. Lexical classes of words – nouns, adjectives, verbs and most adverbs have both lexical and grammatical meaning, while function words (or functors) – articles, prepositions, conjunctions, some adverbs, auxiliary verbs and pronouns are void of lexical meaning and have only grammatical meaning. Their primary function is focused on grammatical relationships within a sentence. Therefore, functional words are very problematic to explain, and have their meaning clearly defined, because they do not have any referent.

In English, grammatical meaning is usually associated with grammatical categories such as number, gender, tense, aspect, voice and various roles functional words have. We will illustrate grammatical meaning with the examples of nouns and verbs.

Traditionally speaking, nouns are defined as words used to designate people, things or other entities. The commonest grammatical meanings which are associated with nouns in English are gender and number. Speaking of verbs, grammatically, they are often defined as words used to describe an action, state or occurrence, and represent the main part of predicate. The most important grammatical meanings of English verbal system are tense, aspect and modality.

All words have both types of meanings. Although some grammatical words, also called function words, have grammatical meaning as a more dominant one, they also have to a certain degree lexical meaning as well. For example, the word chair has lexical meaning which can be described as “a seat for one person that has a back, usually four legs, and sometimes two arms”. It also has grammatical meaning – in terms of countability, it can be defined as a countable noun. This information implies that the word can be used both as a singular and plural form in a sentence.

b. Referential and emotive meaning

Unlike **emotive** meaning, which is characterised by an emotion involved on the part of the speaker or listener when using certain words, **referential** meaning does not produce any emotion and is also known as “**cognitive**” or “**conceptual**” meaning. Referential meaning can be found in dictionaries, it is neutral and does not depend on context or the thoughts and emotions of those involved in a communicative situation. However, the referential meaning of the same word can vary depending on the context wherein it is used. Emotive meaning is not as easy to define as referential meaning because it is context and culture dependent.

The distinction between referential and emotive meaning can be illustrated with a group of words which share the same referential meaning – “with little flesh on the bones (of the body)”. These words are as follows: *thin*, *slender*, *skinny* and *scrawny*.

However, although all these words share the same referential meaning, they differ in the emotive meanings they possess – from the neutral one in case of the word *thin*, through the very positive emotive meaning of the word *slender* “thin and delicate, often in a way that is attractive”, to a somehow negative emotive meaning of the word *skinny* “very thin” and a rather negative emotive meaning of the word *scrawny* “unpleasantly thin, often bones showing”.

c. Concrete and abstract meaning

The main distinction between concrete and abstract meaning refers to the referent. If the referent has physical characteristics and appearance, the word denoting it has **concrete meaning**. On the other hand, if the word refers to an abstract notion, it **has abstract meaning**.

d. Literal and figurative meaning

Apart from the literal meaning of words, much attention has been paid to the figurative use of language. **Literal meaning** involves the basic meaning of words, formally accepted meaning without any additional, figurative or metaphorical meanings. If this conventional meaning changes due to various processes, and gains secondary, metaphorical meaning, we talk about **figurative meaning**.

The distinction between literal and non-literal meaning leads to **extension of meaning** which is closely related to **metaphor** and **metonymy**. Metaphor and metonymy are traditionally studied as rhetorical and stylistic devices, but within cognitive linguistic theoretical framework, they gain more importance as cognitive processes. One of the main proponents of the cognitive approach to the study of the extensions of meaning, who attributed cognitive aspect to the concept and study of metaphors is George Lakoff (1980), an American cognitive linguist and philosopher. Among other linguists, he also promoted generative semantics as a reply to Chomsky’s generative syntax.

e. Denotative and connotative meaning

The commonest classification of meaning, found in scientific studies and everyday communication, is that of denotation and connotation. **Denotative meaning** is the basic, general meaning of a word. It is explicit and neutral, as defined and explained in dictionaries. When we want to get the basic clarification of the meaning of some word, we can often hear sentences as *What does this word denote?*

Unlike denotative meaning, **connotative meaning** is secondary, derived, dependent on culture and a person or situation. It is usually implicit and emotional. When we want to get additional meaning, not explicitly implied by the denotative meaning of the word, we can ask the question *What is its connotation?* (Bugarski, 1996).

1.4.2.1. ADDITIONAL REMARKS ON MEANING

The explanations and definitions of different types of meanings stated in the previous section show that many of the above mentioned types of meanings correlate to each other and share the same characteristics. They are often even used as synonymous by some authors. Thus, referential meaning is often concrete and denotative, while emotive meaning can be connotative, abstract and figurative.

The last remark shows that there are various overlapping names in terminology in semantics, and these very often lead to confusion and ambiguity. Many terms are used as synonyms by different authors, while others make specific distinctions and define these terms differently. For the sake of clarity and straightforwardness, we have adopted an approach to define basic concepts in simple terms, without further discussion and complex and different lights cast on these concepts, as suggested by different authors.

Understanding various aspects and complexities of meaning is not only important in understanding the conveyed message, but it also has a significant role in translation theory and translation practice. Translation theory relies on the theory of meaning because it draws findings and conclusion from it when we need to deal with the following translation issues related to the nature of translation: translatability/ untranslatability, and translation equivalents. Anyone who has ever experienced any translation practice knows how complex this process is, particularly when it comes to the issues whether something is possible to translate from the source into the target language or not, or if it is possible, how accurate the item becomes when translated into the target language.

The use of culturally specific lexical items illustrates the difficulties in dealing with the issue of translation. We will provide an illustrative example stated by David Crystal, a British linguist, in his talk about *World Englishes*.⁷ He mentions the problem of understanding the idiom *Clapham Junction* in the sentence “*Oh, God, it was like Clapham Junction over there*” by anyone who is not British, or is not familiar with the busiest railway station in the south of London. Even though we find the real meaning and understand the sentence as “*It was chaos over there*”, the question arises how to translate it.

1.4.3 COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS

Analogously to phonemes and morphemes, which are basic units of phonology and morphology, respectively, a **sememe** is a basic unit of semantics. All the above mentioned types of meanings imply the complexity of meanings a word can have. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about unique meaning of a word, but rather a group of different components of meanings, or building blocks. These semantic components are also called **semantic distinctive features**, and they can be analysed by **componential analysis**.

Componential analysis, or semantic decomposition, allows words to be defined through their minimal semantic features. The example which illustrates componential analysis is as follows: the semantic features ‘human’, ‘male’ and ‘adult’ can be used to define various lexemes, such as ‘man’, ‘woman’, ‘girl’, ‘boy’, etc. For example, we can define ‘woman’ as [+human], [-male], [+adult], or a boy as [+human], [+male], [-adult].

Componential analysis uses semantic components to define the meaning of a word. Semantic components can be identified by the comparison of semantic characteristics and relations that exist within sets of words. Another example illustrating how componential analysis works is as follows: the set of words *wife*, *husband*, *spinster*, *bachelor* show the presence or absence of the following semantic components [adult], [male], [married], and, thus, each of these can be represented as:

- *wife*: [+adult], [-male], [+married],
- *husband*: [+adult], [+male], [+married],
- *spinster*: [+adult], [-male], [-married],
- *bachelor*: [+adult], [+male], [-married].

Componential analysis, therefore, can be viewed as a kind of semantic analysis, namely semantic decomposition, used to identify semantic components of a word. Its origins can be traced back to European structuralism, particularly to the work of Louis Hjelmslev, who was Saussure’s disciple. He applied the principles of componential sound analysis to the analysis of meanings at the level of a lexeme.

A significant contribution to the development of componential analysis of meaning came from American anthropology and the study of kinship relations.

Componential analysis was further developed and modified within transformationalist model, and the principles and methods arising from the syntactic theory contributed to the study of meaning and meaning components. Although various approaches to componential analysis of meaning differ in views and principles applied in the semantic analysis, they all share the same premise – the meaning of a word is made up of smaller, more rudimentary units of meaning.

7 See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2_q9b9YqGRY&t=387s.

The use of componential analysis of meaning can help us determine paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations better. It is also helpful in translation when we rely on certain semantic components and, thus, find the most appropriate translation equivalent. On the other hand, the drawback of componential analysis lies in the fact that such analysis is restricted to certain lexical fields, and cannot be applied to all lexical items.

When a group of words share some semantic features, we say that they belong to the same **semantic field**. A semantic field refers to a specific subject matter, such as seasons, parts of the day, animals, colours, etc.⁸ Within a semantic field, words are related by meaning, and importantly, not all words have the same status, which accounts for various relations among words, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

8 For the explanation of componential analysis and semantic fields, see Lyons (1996).

Chapter 1: Questions to discuss and exercises

Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background

1. How can semantics be defined?
2. What does semantics study?
3. Which linguistic and non-linguistic disciplines is semantics related to?
4. Explain the relation between semantics and each of these disciplines!
5. What is semiotics?
6. How can semiotics be related to semantics? How did this relation change throughout history?
7. What are the main linguistic frameworks relevant for the study of meaning?
8. How was the study of meaning approached within these linguistic frameworks?
9. Is there any difference between sense and reference?
10. Explain the notions of utterance, sentence and proposition!
11. What does the Semantic Triangle include?
12. What types of meaning are recognised within semantics?

Part 2. Application of theory

Exercise 1. Discuss the following uses and meanings of the word 'mean'/'meaning', and explain how they differ.

- a. What does ubiquity mean?
- b. What does the word *plane* mean in the sentence *He introduced a new plane in the whole organisation of the process?*
- c. What does she mean when she says "I know what my parents want"?
- d. I didn't mean to tell her the truth.
- e. The figures mean that we need to reconsider our initial decision.
- f. When I say that I will act differently next time, I mean it.
- g. If we want to get there on time, it means leaving the house soon.
- h. His attention means a lot to me.
- i. I don't like him – he's too mean, and I always feel uncomfortable around him.
- j. He never buys his friends presents – he is so mean.
- k. He is a mean guitar player.
- l. The mean of 4, 5 and 6 is 5.
- m. Speaking in front of everybody was no mean achievement.

Exercise 2. Choose which synonymous word best fits in each sentence:

- a. skinny, thin, slender
 1. You should eat more – you are _____
 2. I wish I looked like her – she is so _____
 3. He definitely needs to consult a doctor, he is so _____
- b. babe, darling, girl
 1. "I'll get home soon, _____. I hope you and the kids will be still awake when I get home."
 2. "Trust me, she is a total _____"
 3. She is the _____ of my life.

Exercise 3. What type of meaning do we refer to in the following cases:

- a. the word *love* is an uncountable noun.
- b. The word *trunk* can be defined as “ the thick main stem of a tree, from which its branches grow”.
- c. My heart was in my mouth when I heard my name pronounced.

Exercise 4. Which of the following words have positive, negative or neutral connotative meaning?

- a. economical, cheap, frugal
- b. jabbering, talkative, conversational
- c. easygoing, relaxed, half-hearted

Exercise 5. Explain the following words using the principle of componential analysis:

- a. grandfather, grandmother
- b. chicken, rooster
- c. stallion, mare

Exercise 6. Which of the following statements refer to utterance and which to sentence?

1. It is an act of saying.
2. It is a string of words combined together by a grammatical rule.
3. “If I were you, I wouldn’t say a word about the incident.”
4. *If I were you, I wouldn’t say a word about the incident.*
5. It can be grammatical, or grammatically incorrect.
6. It is spoken.
7. It is specified by time, place, speaker, or occasion.

Exercise 7. Say whether the following statements are true or false.

- a. There is a difference between semantics and linguistic semantics.
- b. Semantics as a scientific discipline was established in the 19th century.
- c. The notion of proposition is related to the notion of true.
- d. Reference is a concept of meaning referring to relationships inside language.
- e. Emotive meaning can be connotative, abstract and figurative.
- f. Componential analysis can be applied to all lexical items.
- g. All authentic performances of Hamlet begin with the same sentence.
- h. All authentic performances of Hamlet begin with the same utterance.

CHAPTER 2: LEXICAL SEMANTICS

2.1. LEXICAL SEMANTICS – INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Lexical semantics is a branch of semantics studying the meaning of words. The main phenomena studied within lexical semantics can be broadly separated into two main areas:

1. internal semantic characteristics of individual words, and
2. semantic relations among words within a vocabulary of a language

The first domain is concerned with topics such as polysemy, metonymy, metaphor and prototypes, while the second is dominated by studies related to lexical fields, lexical relations, conceptual metaphor and metonymy. These two different approaches to lexical semantics can be termed as “**onomasiological**” (concerned with the meanings within single words) and “**semasiological**” (relating to the semantic relationship between words).

2.2. SEMANTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF INDIVIDUAL WORDS

Words have their own individual meanings. These meanings can be of different types, and they are usually categorised in opposition, as pairs of meanings, such as lexical and grammatical, referential and emotive, concrete and abstract, literal and figurative, and denotative and connotative meanings. These meanings were described in previous chapter.

The basic starting point in semantics is to establish the meanings a word can have. The main concept of meaning of a single word in lexical semantics relates to the notion of polysemy.

2.2.1. POLYSEMY

If a word has more than one meaning, we talk about **polysemy**. A **polyseme** is a word with multiple meanings (πολύ-, *polý-*, meaning “many” and σήμα, *sêma*, meaning “sign”). The adjective forms can be both **polysemous** or **polysemic**. When a word exhibits only one meaning, it represents the case of **monosemy**. Monosemous words usually belong to technical register, and they do not cause any ambiguity in language.⁹

The examples of polysemic words in English are numerous. The following example illustrates polysemy and different meaning of the word *paper*:

1. I wrote the note on a piece of paper. (“a thin material made from wood”)
2. I read the news in the local paper. (“newspaper”)
3. I had to show the papers to the police officer. (“documents, papers” – plural form)
4. In this paper we focus on lexical semantics. (“a piece of writing on particular subject”)

Polysemy is often contrasted with homonymy, because it is difficult to determine whether a single word has different meanings (when we talk about polysemy), or two or more different words share the same meaning (homonymy). This ambiguity arises from the difficulty to determine whether we are dealing with one and the same word, or with different words which have the same form, but different meanings.¹⁰

It is not always that easy to establish strict criteria for distinguishing polysemy from homonymy because there are many instances showing the lack of a clear borderline between the two. Some suggest that we should apply our judgment in determining whether a word has two or more distinct, but related meanings, or two or more different words, which have the same form or are pronounced in the same way, have unrelated meanings.

⁹ See Murphy (2010).

¹⁰ There is a distinction in homonymy - if two or more words sound the same, they are called homophones, and if they have the same spelling, they are called homographs. In both cases, they have unrelated meanings.

However, there are cases when it is difficult to differentiate polysemy from homonymy. One of the ways to solve this ambiguity is to look at the history and the development of these words, and some dictionaries rely on this information, separating these words into more than one dictionary entry if they are homonyms, or defining the word under one entry if it is a polysemic word.

Due to the change of meaning, once polysemic words are today considered to be homonyms, because the historical link between these words has been lost, and only those interested in etymology can see the link between the meanings and consider them as polysemes. The examples which illustrate this change are as follows: gentle – genteel, flower – flour, metal – mettle, of – off, petty – petite, genre – gender (Stockwell, 2006: 148). Each of these pairs originate from the same word, but, in time, they differentiated their meanings and became two separate lexical items.

Although there is not always a clear line between polysemy and homonymy, in many instances we can rely on the following criterion - in case of polysemy, there are certain connections in different meanings a word can have. These connections are either obvious, or subtle, but they exist. For example, the word *wood* is polysemic because it has different meanings which are related:

1. He was chopping wood all day yesterday.
2. He was walking through the wood all day yesterday.

On the other hand, such relatedness in meaning cannot be established with homonyms. For example, the word *bank* has two completely unrelated meanings, and, thus, can be treated as two different words which have the same form and sound the same.

1. I had to go to the bank and open a new account.
2. I spent the whole day lying by the bank, enjoying peace and quiet of the surrounding nature.

What characterises English vocabulary is the fact that many words (according to some estimates even more than 40%) have more than one meaning, which makes it difficult for language learners to understand and use English words in different contexts. The phenomenon of polysemic words results from various semantic changes which usually just add new meanings to the existing words, and, thus, make the meanings of single words more complex and multifaceted.

2.2.2. CHANGE OF MEANING

One of the inherent characteristics of language is that it is constantly changing, and **semantic change** is an indispensable part of language evolution. Words change their meaning over time. There are various reasons why these changes occur, and there are also different types of changes of meaning. Generally speaking, a word can change its meaning and develop a new meaning, or lose the old one, following different directions – towards more specific or generalised, metaphorical, improved or derogated, or some other type of meaning.

The most widely accepted classification of semantic change was introduced and described by the American linguist Leonard Bloomfield in 1933. He proposed the following types of changes in meaning: narrowing, widening, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, litotes, degeneration and elevation (Palmer, 1981: 8).

2.2.2.1. SEMANTIC NARROWING

Semantic narrowing is a type of semantic change when a word changes and becomes more narrowed in meaning. This process of semantic change is also known as **restriction** or **specialisation**. The example of semantic narrowing can be illustrated by the word *meat*. In Old English the word *mete* meant *food*, but in time, the meaning was specialised to only one type of food – processed animal flesh. Still, in modern English, the word *sweetmeat* (a small piece of sweet food), although old-fashioned, retains the original meaning of the word *meat*. This shows how amazing, but at the same time complex and unpredictable, the change of meaning can be.

2.2.2.2. SEMANTIC WIDENING

The opposite process of narrowing is **semantic widening**, also termed **broadening** or **generalisation**. In time, the meaning of words can become more generalised and used in more contexts. The example which illustrates the process of widening is the word *business*. At first, it meant “being busy”, a derived noun from the adjective *busy*, while, in time, it got additional meanings, and nowadays it includes different meanings referring to work.

2.2.2.3. METAPHOR

In historical linguistics, **metaphor** is perceived as semantic change, and it is defined as a change occurring as a result of some similarity between the original and the target concept which the word refers to. Through metaphor, some qualities are transferred from a source idea or object to a target idea or object. When a word is used metaphorically, the comparison with the source concept is implicit, and can lead to confusion if taken literally. For example, when we say *Mark is a lion*, we do not refer to the animal, but the characteristic of a lion – being fearless and courageous.

2.2.2.4. METONYMY

Metonymic processes play an important role in semantic change. When we use a word to refer to something closely associated with the concept that the word in its basic meaning refers to, we call it **metonymy**. Metonymy relies on some association existing between two concepts, and unlike metaphor, there is no transfer of certain qualities from one referent to the other, which gets metaphorical meaning. If we say *The White House made an announcement*, we use the phrase *the White House* to refer to presidential staff.

Sometimes metonymic processes result in polysemy, and, thus, a word gets additional meanings, which could be mutually interconnected. This semantic change can be helpful in determining whether a word is polysemic, or whether it is the case of two different homonymous words.

2.2.2.5. SYNECDOCHE

Closely related to metonymy is **synecdoche**, which is considered to be a specific type of metonymy. The following propositions can be used in order to make the distinction between synecdoche and metonymy clear:

- if “A” as a part is used to refer to “B” as a whole, it is the example of synecdoche, and
- if ‘B’ is a part of ‘A’, then it is the example of metonymy.

For example, *Let’s open the bubble to celebrate – bubble stands for champagne* – we witness the change of meaning where *bubble*, as a part of *champagne* replaces the whole concept of *champagne*, in its adjectival form, illustrating synecdoche.

2.2.2.6. HYPERBOLE AND LITOTES

Hyperbole and litotes are similar devices which have opposite effects. The first device, **hyperbole**, is used when we want to exaggerate and add inflated meaning to the basic one. For example, if we say *I have told you a million times that I am not interested*, it does not imply the exact number of “a million”. It means that we want to emphasise the repetition of the verb “say”, and with the exaggeration achieved with the word “a million”, we focus on this meaning.

Litotes is, on the other hand, the use of language in order to express understatement. For example, if someone has broken a leg, and when asked about the pain, he answers “*It hurts a bit*” - this is the example of understatement, because this injury involves excruciating pain, not to be described by the quantifier “a bit”.

Another difference between hyperbole and litotes involves the absence or presence of irony. In case of hyperbole, there is no irony, the intended meaning, although exaggerated, is obvious. For example, if we say “*I can’t go with you, I have a ton of homework*” we just want to add emphasis on how much we are busy. However, in case of litotes, there is always some subtle message underlying the statement which includes some ironic attitude, which demands a more careful interpretation because of the subdued tone of the statement. Many stereotypical jokes describing habits and cultures of certain groups of people and nationalities rely on the use of understatement.

2.2.2.7. DEGENERATION

Words can change their meaning in such a way that, over time, they gain negative connotations. This semantic change is known as **degeneration**. The example of this semantic change can be illustrated with the word *accident*. At first, it meant a “chance event” (therefore the adverb *accidentally*), but, over time, apart from its original meaning, it gained negative connotation associated with something bad that happens and causes damages or injuries.

2.2.2.8. ELEVATION

The opposite process of degeneration is **elevation**, when a word gains positive connotations. The examples illustrating this semantic change are the intensifiers *terribly* and *awfully*, which mean “very”. This process can be illustrated with the following example:

The story is terribly boring.

2.2.2.9. THE SHIFT IN MEANING

If a word comes to mean something absolutely new, losing its original meanings, we talk about **the shift in meaning**. A classic example for shift is the word *gay*, which used to mean *cheerful*, but now it refers to a homosexual person.

2.2.2.10. BORROWING AND THE CHANGE OF MEANING

Words can be borrowed from other languages, and this process of borrowing can also be followed by the change of meaning. This type of change can be illustrated by the modern English word *gospel*, whose meaning is related to religion. However, the literal meaning of the word *gospel* is “a good message”, and this word is a calque or a loan translation modeled by the Greek compound εὐαγγέλιου (“*evangelium*”), composed of two Greek words meaning “good” and “message” (Bloomfield, 1963: 169). The original meaning of the Greek compound was “good tidings”. This example illustrates the unpredictable directions of semantic change.¹¹

2.3. SEMANTIC RELATIONS BETWEEN WORDS

In the previous chapter we described different types of meanings single words can have. Lexical semantics is also concerned with semantic relations which exist between words. Namely, different semantic relations can be established between words, and these words form pairs and groups related to each other through some semantic characteristic. The main aim of this chapter is to describe various types of semantic relations that exist between words. These semantic relations include the following: homonymy, synonymy, oppositeness, hyponymy, meronymy and taxonomy.¹²

¹¹ For semantic change, see Stockwell (2006)

¹² For a detailed description of sense relations, see Lyons (1996) and Cruse (1987).

2.3.1. HOMONYMY

Homonyms are words which have the same form, or pronunciation, but different meanings. The semantic relation established between these words is called **homonymy**. For example, there are two distinct lexemes – *bear*, a noun meaning “an animal”, and *bear*, the verb meaning “to carry”, which have the same form and pronunciation, but have completely different meanings, and even belong to different parts of speech.

Within the notion of homonymy, two distinct types are distinguished – **homographs** and **homophones**.

Homographs are words that have the same spelling, though their pronunciation can differ. The example of homograph can be illustrated by the lexemes *tear* /teə/ - meaning “to rip” and *tear* /tɪə/ - meaning “drops of liquid coming out of your eyes”.

The example of homophone can be illustrated by the lexemes *knight* – meaning “a man given a rank of honour”, and *night* – meaning “a part of the day”.

A more restricted definition of homonymy implies that real homonyms differ in both spelling and pronunciation. The adjective **homonymous** can be used to describe words which share the same form.

As it was explained in the previous chapter, sometimes it is very difficult to distinguish between homonymy and polysemy, and say with certainty whether one word has distinctive meanings (polysemy) or there are two or more separate words with the same form, but different meanings.

2.3.2. SYNONYMY – INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The semantic relation established between words which have the same or similar meaning is called **synonymy**. The adjective **synonymous** can be used to describe different words which share the same or similar meanings. There are numerous examples of synonymy within the English language, and the following are just some which illustrate this semantic relation: *allure/ lure/ attract/ entice, or complain/ grumble/ moan/ whine*.

Although much has been written about synonymy by linguistics and grammarians, the satisfactory and straightforward definition of this phenomenon still remains elusive and incomprehensible, because of the complex nature of meanings words have, and their uses in particular contexts, registers, dialects, by different social groups or individuals.

2.3.2.1. DEFINITIONS OF SYNONYMY

The simplest definition of synonymy goes as “the sameness of meaning” (Radford, 1999: 198). It refers to synonyms which have the same denotative meaning, do not show any specific shade of meaning, and can be interchangeable in all contexts. However, these synonyms are rare, if existent at all, because many synonyms express similarities rather than sameness in meanings, and these may vary in denotation, attitude and emotion, register and style, and also in their collocational range. Furthermore, this definition does not provide much information about the complex nature of semantic relations which exist between synonymous words, because synonyms do not necessarily have the same meanings.

Another definition, which is more precise and expands on the previous one, goes as follows – synonyms are words which have different forms, but the same, or similar meanings. This definition, often exploited to explain synonymy, although more precise, still lacks fine shades of similarities or sameness of meanings. A more specific definition was formulated by Greenbaum, who wrote: “Synonyms are expressions that are identical or similar in meaning and that can be used interchangeably in at least one context” (Greenbaum, 1996: 420).

Cruse defined and explained synonymy in more precise terms, taking into account complex semantic characteristics inherent to words. He stated that “Synonyms are lexical items whose senses are identical in respect of “central” semantic traits, but differ, if at all, only in respect of what we may provisionally describe as ‘minor’ or ‘peripheral’ traits” (Cruse, 1986: 267).

2.3.2.2. THE COMPLEX NATURE OF SYNONYMY

What characterises synonymy is the complex nature of the semantic relations existing between synonymous words. Words can be defined as synonymous, but what makes this relation so complicated is the fact that these words cannot be mutually interchangeable in all contexts. They are synonymous in specific senses, and only when these particular senses are applicable in the same context, can we say that they are synonymous.

For example, the words *big* and *large* are synonymous when they refer to size or amount – *Do you have these jeans in a bigger/ larger size?* However, *big* can have other meanings, such as “older” – *He is my big (older) brother*, so in this context we cannot replace the word *big* with the word *large*, because they do not share the same denotational sememe.

Synonyms are numerous in language, English being no exception. However, if we take into consideration the above mentioned complex nature of synonymy, real synonyms are not that common. Some linguists even claim that real synonymy does not exist because there are no words with absolutely the same meaning, used in all contexts interchangeably, with the same referential and stylistic values.

A very glance at any dictionary, especially those specialised, such as thesauri, will support the claim that there are no words that have exactly the same meanings in all contexts and registers, used by all people and in all circumstances. For example, *strong* is a synonym of *powerful* in the sentence *Ginger extract has a strong/ powerful effect on the immune system*, but these two words do not have the same meaning in sentences *He is a strong man* and *He is a powerful man*.

Not all synonyms have the same degree of sameness or similarity in meaning – some pairs of synonyms are “more synonymous” than others (Cruse, 1986: 265). For example, *trachea* and *windpipe* are synonymous, they mean absolutely the same, although the first is of Latin origin and belongs to a medical register, while the latter is an English word, generally used by people outside medical profession.

2.3.2.3. THE TYPES OF SYNONYMS

With respect to the above mentioned, there are three types of synonyms. They are distinguished on the basis of the scale of similarity which can be established between the synonymous words. These types are as follows: total or absolute synonymy, cognitive or propositional synonymy and near-synonymy.

2.3.2.3.1. Total or absolute synonymy

If words are considered to be absolutely synonymous, the following criteria need to be fulfilled (Lyons, 2005: 61):

- a) all the meanings of these words need to be identical,
- b) they need to be synonymous, or interchangeable, in all contexts, and
- c) the words are semantically equivalent (having the same meaning on its all dimensions).

If we take into consideration the above mentioned criteria, it can be concluded that absolute synonymy is very rare due to the complexities of meanings a word can have and various contexts it can be used in.

However, there are many examples which are close to absolute synonymy, and some of these pairs are as follows:

start: begin,

hate: loath,

enjoyable: pleasurable, etc.

Some linguists consider dialectal variations and technical terminology the only examples of absolute synonymy. The best examples illustrating this point of view belong to the variants of British and American English, as the following pairs of words illustrate:

rubbish: trash,
sofa: couch,
year: grade,
primary: elementary,
break: recess, etc.

Still, it is disputable whether these examples actually represent absolute synonymy because of different contexts and registers these words are used in. This issue leads us into another type of synonymy, which is called cognitive synonymy.

2.3.2.3.2. Cognitive or propositional synonymy

As a result of the absence of absolute synonymy in language, many linguists talk about **cognitive synonymy** to refer to a more precise definition of synonymy, and, thus, avoid this ambiguity of the nature of synonymy. These synonyms are called **cognitive synonyms**. Cognitive synonyms are words which have the same denotative meaning, but can differ in expressive or emotive meaning, style (colloquial and formal) and discourse. The examples of cognitive synonymy are those which refer to some expressive characteristic, in other words, characteristics which contain some emotion or attitude. Thus, both *father* and *daddy* have the same referent – whether one will opt for the first or the second word depends on the emotion on the part of the speaker towards the referent.

2.3.2.3.3. Near-synonymy

Synonyms which show greater differences in shades of meaning are usually called **near - synonyms**. They show semantic relations which are relatively close in meaning, and they overlap in meaning. Near-synonyms are also closely connected to the semantic relation of hyponymy. There are also synonyms with broader semantic relations, and these do not completely correlate in terms of exactness.

2.3.2.4. OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF SYNONYMY

Compared to other sense relations, in terms of context dependence, synonymy is the most dependent of all. The implications arising from this fact are important in language learning, particularly for the development of productive language skills, such as speaking, writing and translation, when it is necessary to make the right choice of words in given contexts. In order to produce and understand lexical items correctly, we also need to have cultural contextualisation, to be aware of the register, style (formal or informal) and the discourse wherein the items are used.

Synonyms are often used to explain or clarify the meaning of other lexical items which relate to them as their synonymous equivalents. When we are not sure about meaning of some words, we can give explanations by providing synonyms for these. For example, when we say *This detergent has a detrimental effect on your hands*, we can ask *What does “detrimental” mean?*, and give the explanation *It means harmful or damaging*. In this way, we provide explanations for the word which is not familiar to us by its synonymous equivalents we are already familiar with.

The relationship of similarity between two words is often expressed by the following lexical items or groups of items: *that is to say, or, in other words, more exactly*, and *alike*. For example, by saying *He was rather discouraged by the idea, or more exactly, he was demoralised*, we use two synonymous words – *discouraged* and *demoralised*, in the same context to give a clarification of the meaning by repeating different words with similar meaning.

2.3.3. OPPOSITENESS

The semantic relation established between words which have opposite meaning is called **opposition**. These relationships are expressed in binary oppositions – there are two members in a set of opposition. Opposition is often called **antonymy**, although antonyms have more restricted meanings, which will be explained further down.

We are surrounded by words which have opposite meanings in everyday life, and among all semantic relations existing between lexical items, antonymy is the easiest one to be understood by ordinary people, and those who do not have any linguistic knowledge. For example, while crossing a street, we observe whether the traffic lights say *go* or *stop*, or while entering a shop, we need either to *push* or *pull* the door. It is believed that it is in human nature to polarise things in contrasts – something is either *good* or *bad*, *cheap* or *expensive*, *easy* or *difficult*, and we are taught these dichotomies from our very early childhood. It is believed that it is easier to organise reality and our experience if we define them through opposites. Therefore, the semantic relation of antonymy holds a special place in our lives.

Organising and defining words through their opposites is very common when we learn a language. Antonymy is typically found in adjectives, but other parts of speech also show oppositeness in meaning: nouns, verbs, adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions. The following examples show antonymy in:

adjectives: *ignorant: knowledgeable, sociable: introverted*
verbs: *start: finish, open: close*
nouns: *friend: enemy, cause: result*
adverbs: *slowly: fast, often: rarely*
prepositions: *in: out, under: above*
conjunctions: *and: but, if: unless*

Antonyms can also be derived by **prefixing** and **suffixing**. For example, typical adjective forming suffixes which are added to nouns to express the opposite meanings are *-ful* and *-less*, for example:

help → *helpful: helpless*,
use → *useful: useless*.

In English, prefixes which have negative meaning, and are added to words having positive meaning to make their opposites are as follows: *un-*, *in-*, *im-/ir-/il-*, *dis-*, *mis-*. The following pairs of words illustrate oppositeness in meaning:

honest: dishonest,
practical: impractical,
approachable: unapproachable,
appropriate: inappropriate,
relevant: irrelevant,
logical: illogical.

Oppositeness is not a unique concept, and we can distinguish the following types of lexical opposites: complementary antonyms, relational antonyms and graded antonyms.

2.3.3.1. COMPLEMENTARY ANTONYMS

Complementary antonyms are the easiest to define in terms of oppositeness, because they are rather straightforward in their meaning. What characterises complementary antonyms is the absence of gradability, there is no intermediate or medium element which could be placed between two complementary antonyms. The examples of these antonyms are as follows:

dead: alive,
pass: fail,
right: wrong.

If we accept one term to be applicable to one situation, we deny the applicability of its complementary antonym. If we say *Tom is alive*, it means that *Tom is not dead* – he can be either *alive* or *dead*, there is no adjective with an intermediate meaning, something in between *alive* and *dead*.

2.3.3.2. RELATIONAL ANTONYMS

Relational antonyms are similar to complementary antonyms in terms of the absence of gradability, but they differ because the existence of one does not exclude the existence of the other. For example, the adverbs *above* and *below* illustrate a pair of relational antonyms, because if something is *below*, it cannot be *above*, but, on the other hand, if it is *below* it presupposed that there must be *above* as well. They are called relational because they have the relation *if-then*, for example if *The photo is above the table*, then *The table is below the photo*. Other examples of relational antonyms are as follows:

verbs: *buy: sell, lend: borrow*
nouns: *husband: wife, servant: master*
adverbs: *above/:below, outside: inside*
prepositions: *in: out, on: off*

2.3.3.3. GRADED ANTONYMS

Graded antonyms can be exemplified by the following pairs of adjectives:

long: short,
fast: slow,
easy: difficult.

These antonyms can be graded either explicitly or implicitly. The use of the antonyms *tall* and *short* in the sentence *Tom is shorter than his brother* illustrates explicit gradability, while *The short giraffe is a tall animal* illustrates implicit gradability because giraffes are tall animals, so the latter is not illogical because of this reality, and not grammaticality.

2.3.4. HIERARCHICAL LEXICAL SEMANTIC RELATIONS

Apart from the semantic relations presented in the previous chapters, lexical semantics also studies those lexical semantic relations which are structured in hierarchical sets and serve as good organisational mechanisms. Namely, lexical items are organised in various hierarchical semantic relations, among which the commonest are hyponymy, meronymy and taxonomy.

2.3.4.1. HYPONYMY

Hyponymy is a linguistic phenomenon of semantic structuring of words within a hierarchically established group of lexical items. It is also defined as a logical relation of inclusion (Škiljan, 1985: 126). Hyponymy as a semantic relation includes **hyponyms** and **hyperonyms**, or **hypernyms**. Hyponyms are lexical items which are of a lower hierarchical status of a more generic term, hyperonym. A hyperonym is considered to be an umbrella term which includes specific examples of it. Hyponyms share with their hyperonyms some semantic characteristic, and are included within them, and the relationship between the two can be established with “a type of” formula. Hyponym has a more specific meaning than its hyperonym. Hyperonyms belong to a superordinate semantic field, while their hyponyms have their subordinate semantic characteristics. For example, *apple*, *pear*, *grape*, *plum* are all hyponyms of the hyperonym *fruit*.

Hyponymy is typically present in nouns, but other parts of speech also show this semantic relation. For example, the verb *to walk* is a hyperonym of the verbs *to hike* (“to walk for a long distance, especially across country”), *to stroll* (“to walk in a slow and relaxed way”). All these hyponyms include the semantic characteristic “to walk”, but also denote a specific type of walk.

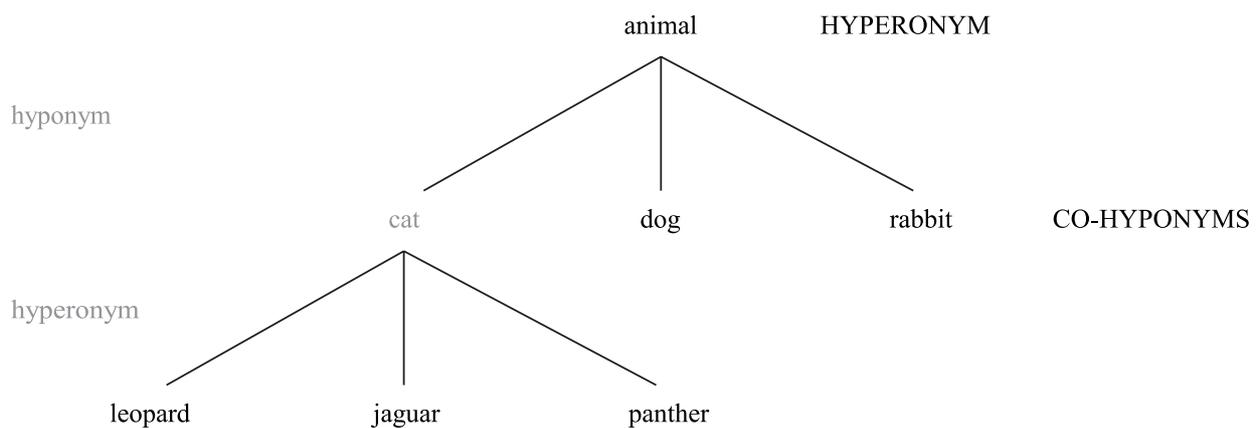
Words that are hyponyms of the same hyperonym are called **co-hyponyms**. For example, the semantic field including words denoting the blue colour *indigo*, *navy*, *azure* are all hyponyms of the word *blue*, but they are also co-hyponyms because they have the same hierarchical status in relation to the word *blue*. Co-hyponyms can be related to one another by the relation of incompatibility, but this is not always the case. The given example shows that *indigo*, *navy* and *azure* are incompatible, because if something is *azure*, it cannot be *indigo*, and vice versa. However, there are co-hyponyms which can be compatible in some senses. For example, both *brother* and *husband* are hyponyms of the word *man*. But, one does not exclude the other, namely, someone can be both a husband and a brother at the same time.

Hyponymy has more layers, and if a word is a hyponym of a broader term, its hyperonym, the same word can be a hyperonym to some other subordinate term. For example the word *cat* is a hyponym of the word *animal*, but also a hyperonym to the word *kitten*.

Hyponymy shows transitive relations, and the following proposition can be applied to support this: *If A is a hyponym of B, and B is a hyponym of C, then A is a hyponym of C.*

The hierarchical semantic relations of the words *animal*, *cat*, *dog*, *rabbit*, *leopard*, *jaguar* and *panther* can be shown with the following diagram:

Diagram 1. The hierarchical structure of words related by hyponymy



The diagram above can be interpreted in the following way:

- ▶ *animal* is the hyperonym of *cat*, *dog* and *rabbit*
- ▶ *animal* is also the hyperonym of *leopard*, *jaguar* and *panther*
- ▶ *cat*, *dog* and *rabbit* are hyponyms of *animal*
- ▶ *cat*, *dog* and *rabbit* are co-hyponyms
- ▶ *leopard*, *jaguar* and *panther* are hyponyms of *cat*
- ▶ *cat* is the hyperonym of *leopard*, *jaguar* and *panther*
- ▶ *cat* is both a hyponym and hyperonym within the semantic field composed of the stated words.

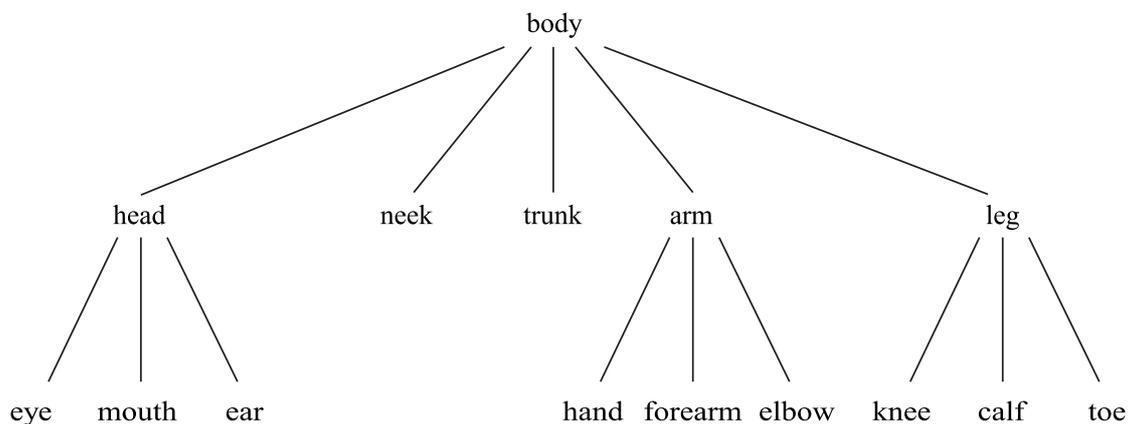
The diagram also shows that the higher levels are more general, while the lower ones are more specific and are included in the higher ones.

2.3.4.2. MERONYMY

Another way of classifying lexical items through hierarchical structure is by establishing semantic relations of **meronymy**. Meronymy denotes part-whole relation between a lexical item which denotes a part and the corresponding lexical item which denotes the whole, which is called a **holonym**. A **meronym** is a name for a lexical item which denotes a part of another lexical item denoting a whole.

The semantic relation of meronymy can be exemplified by the semantic field containing words denoting parts of the body. The following diagram illustrates the hierarchical structure of such semantic field.

Diagram 2: The parts of the body meronymy



If we analyse the diagram, analogously to the semantic relations existing among words in hyponymy, the following groups of words represent the semantic relation of co-meronymy:

- ▶ *head*, *neck*, *trunk*, *arm* and *leg*,
- ▶ *eye*, *mouth*, *ear*,
- ▶ *hand*, *palm*, *elbow*, and
- ▶ *knee*, *calf*, *toe*.

These groups of words are called **co-meronyms**, and they represent sister parts of the lexical field comprising parts of the body.

The human body meronymy shown above illustrates that there is a connection between extra-linguistic hierarchy and the corresponding linguistic, lexical hierarchy. However, these two are not identical. The nature of part-whole relation is not a straightforward one, and there are different types of semantic relations established within meronymy.

One of the levels of semantic relations of meronymy classifies meronyms into **necessary**, or **canonical**, and **optional** or **facilitative**. The first type refers to a real meronymy, when the relationship between a part and a whole is always present.

A good example illustrating a canonical meronym is *nose* (a meronym of *face*), because nose is always a part of face.¹³ If a meronym is an optional part of the whole, this type is called facilitative. For example, *cushion* is a facilitative meronym of *chair* because it can be either a part of a chair, but not necessarily – there are chairs without cushions, and cushions can exist separately from chairs.

Meronymy is similar to hyponymy because the semantic relations existing among the lexical items can be structured in a hierarchical order in both of these sense relations. The main difference is as follows: hyponymy is a type-of relation, while meronymy is a part-of relation. For example, a *skin* can be a meronym of an *apple*, and an *apple* a hyponym of *fruit*.

2.3.4.3. TAXONOMY

Another hierarchical organisation of lexical items can be studied within **taxonomy**. Taxonomy is another sense relation which can be perceived as a kind of hyponymy. The formula we can use to determine taxonomy is as follows: An A is a kind/ type of B. It shows that a **taxonym** is necessarily a hyponym. Therefore, these two semantic relations overlap, and it can be complicated and vague to determine with certainty whether taxonomy or hyponymy is at work. For example, *sail* and *crawl* are both hyponyms of *move*, but only *crawl* is a taxonym.

13 We will ignore degenerative and exceptional cases here, and use the adverb always due to the simplicity of presentation.

Chapter 2: Lexical Semantics: Questions to discuss and exercises

Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background

Topic 1: Semantic characteristics of individual words

1. What does lexical semantics study?
2. What is the difference between onomasiological and semasiological approaches to meaning?
3. What is a polyseme?
4. What is the difference between polysemy and homonymy?
5. Semantic change is a natural process in language evolution. True/ False
6. Semantic _____ is a type of semantic change when a word changes and becomes more narrowed in meaning. This process of semantic change is also known as _____ or _____.
7. The opposite process of narrowing is _____.
8. How is metaphor defined?
9. What does metonymy rely on?
10. _____ is used when we want to exaggerate, and _____ for understatement.

Topic 2: Semantic relations between words

1. What is homonymy?
2. Explain why synonymy is such a complex issue to be clearly defined.
3. Synonyms can be classified into _____, _____ and _____.
4. What is opposition in semantics?
5. Which types of lexical oppositeness can be distinguished?
6. Hyponymy as a semantic relation includes lexical items which are of a lower hierarchical status - _____ and lexical items of a more generic meaning - _____.
7. What are co-hyponyms?
8. Finish the proposition which illustrates the transitive relations existing within hyponymy: *If A is a hyponym of B, and B is a hyponym of C, then _____.*
9. What does meronymy denote?
10. Holonym is a name for a lexical item denoting _____, and meronym is a name for a lexical item denoting _____.
11. Meronymy can be classified into _____ or _____ and _____ or _____.
12. Taxonomy can be interpreted as a kind of _____.

Part 2. Application of theory

Topic 1: Semantic characteristics of individual words

1. Identify the type of meaning the words in bold have in the following pairs of sentences:
 - a. Mark used to work for a local **newspaper**.
 - b. I rarely read daily **newspapers**.

 - c. My sister has **fair** hair.
 - d. The referee was not **fair**.

 - e. My dog wagged her **tail** when I dragged her out for a walk.
 - f. A yellow car has been **tailing** me for a while.

2. Use a dictionary to decide whether the following words are the examples of monosemy, polysemy or homonymy:

sheer, adj.

kidney, n.

plane, n.

walk, vb.

mouth, n.

3. What type of the change of meaning can be identified in the words in bold in the following sentences:

a. **America** votes in spring.

b. I have four hungry **mouths** to feed for the weekend.

c. Her tears were **river** flowing down her cheeks.

d. The **head** of the company refused to talk about the salary increase with the employees.

e. You cannot use an **alibi** for being late – you should have left home earlier.

f. I am **starving**.

h. He is such a **nice** man.

i. It is a **silly** question – I don't want to answer it.

j. The nurse elevated the **foot** of the bed.

k. Ancient Egypt is believed to be one of the first **cradles** of civilisation.

l. She ate a **mountain** of pop corn.

m. The sandwich she made **was not inedible**.

n. The Modern English word **holiday** used to have a more narrowed meaning – a holy day.

Topic 2: Semantic relations between words

1. Identify the semantic relation between the following pairs of words (homonymy, synonymy, antonymy):

(a) He bought me a **book** for my birthday.

(b) He has already **booked** his summer holiday.

(c) He was **baffled**.

(d) The whole situation made him **perplexed**.

(e) I don't like this drink – it's too **bitter**.

(f) I like **sweet** dessert wines.

(g) He is a member of a rock **band**.

(h) He bound the letters with a red **band**.

(i) It's so **quiet** here.

(j) This street is so **noisy** at night.

(k) She was **lucky** to have him by her side.

(l) She is **fortunate** to have this job.

2. Relying on the semantic relation existing between the first pair of words, finish the second pair of words:

(a) stubborn: obstinate → valid: _____

(b) die: dye → stake: _____

(c) sociable: introverted → soft: _____

(d) positive: optimistic → lazy: _____

(e) moan: mown → straight: _____

(f) modest: boastful → safe: _____

3. Choose the best synonymous option(s) to fit the context.

(a) I think I'm coming down with something. I feel so _____ *fragile/ weak/ frail*

(b) If you want to support your opinion, you need a _____ argument. *solid/ tough/ strong*

(c) Everybody respects him, and he enjoys public praise – he's such an _____ person. *honest/ trustworthy/ honorable*

(d) The company is experiencing a very _____ period. *turbulent/ stong/ confusing*

4. Replace the underlined word by the most appropriate antonym.

(a) He is very modest – he is satisfied with everything his parents buy him. *boastful/ moderate*

(b) His boss is very mean – he does not want to negotiate over the employees' salaries. *generous/ kind*

(c) We are less innocent as we grow older. *guilty/ corrupted*

(d) I feel very bitter about your behaviour. *sweet/ satisfied*

5. Identify the hierarchical semantic relations existing between/ among the following pairs/ groups of words.

lavender, purple, colour

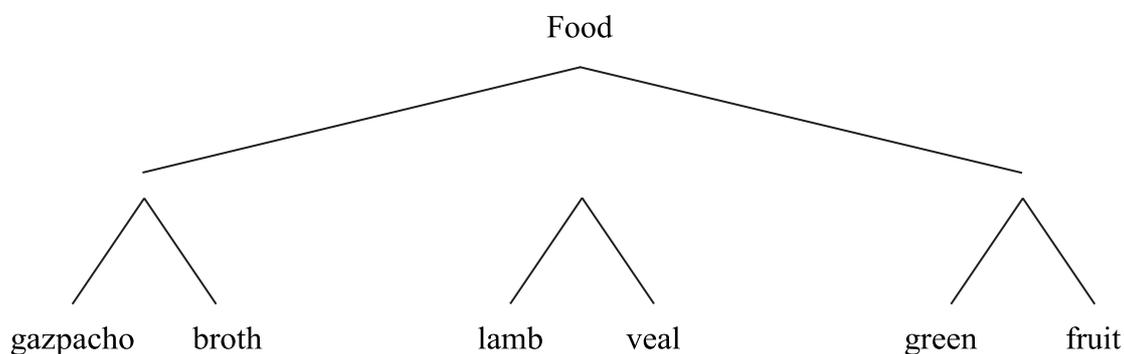
flower, petal

flower, rose, jasemin

cook, roast, fry

branch, tree, twig

6. Analyse the semantic relations among the words given in the diagram.



7. Draw a diagram which will illustrate the semantic relation of hyponymy of the following set of words: crocodile, snake, lizard, animal, reptile, Komodo dragon, chameleon.

8. Draw a diagram which will illustrate the semantic relation of meronymy of the following set of words: root, base, word, suffix, prefix, affix.

CHAPTER 3: SYNTAGMATIC SEMANTIC RELATIONS

3.1. PARADIGMATIC AND SYNTAGMATIC RELATIONS – INTRODUCTORY NOTES

In semantics, two basic types of sense relations are distinguished – **paradigmatic** and **syntagmatic**. The distinction between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations in linguistics was first introduced with structuralists. At the beginning, these two relations were considered to be contrasting notions. However, a study of lexical structure contains both types of relations, and although these two types are clearly defined and distinguished, none of them can be analysed and discussed without referring to the other one. In contemporary semantics, paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations are viewed as complementary.

Every lexical item holds two types of relationships – one type refers to the relationship a lexeme has with other lexical items which can replace it, and the other type refers to the relationship a lexical item gets into with other items within the same construction, while combining with other words. The first is called **paradigmatic**, and the latter **syntagmatic relationship**.¹⁴

In the previous chapter, we studied various aspects of paradigmatic semantics (synonymy, oppositeness, hyponymy, etc.). Paradigmatic semantics studies relations among words which refer to selection. These relations have the nature of choice – i.e., the choice which lexical item, among those sharing paradigmatic relationships, to use. For example, the lexeme *dog* holds paradigmatic relations with other lexemes, such as *cat*, *parrot*, *bitch*, *puppy*, *animal*. Thus, we can say *I love dogs*, and we can replace the lexeme *dog* with any other belonging to the same semantic field – *I love animals*, *I love puppies*, etc.

On the other hand, syntagmatic semantics is concerned with combinations of words. A lexeme combines with other lexemes, and they form a syntagmatic relation. For example, the lexeme *dog* combines with the verb *bark*, and they form the syntagm **dogs bark**. The lexeme **dog** can also combine with the indefinite article **a**, when used in generic meaning. Both examples (**dogs** in plural form, and **a dog**) illustrate how lexemes are bound together and used in broader syntactic formations (syntagms – clauses – sentences), whereby they respect grammatical rules. Syntagmatic relations are not selective like paradigmatic, namely we do not choose between two lexemes from a semantic field, but combine them in a syntagm.

Single lexemes do not bear meaning only in isolation, but they combine with other lexemes in use and they contribute to the meaning of these constructions which are longer than single words – in syntagms, clauses and sentences. In order to create and understand these formations, in most cases it is enough just to know the meanings of individual lexical items which form a syntagm or a sentence. In such cases, we apply the principle of **compositionality**, which implies that the meaning of a linguistic expression containing two or more words combined together can be inferred from the meanings of its constituent elements and rules employed to combine them.

However, there are cases when the meaning of the whole construction is not a simple sum up of the meanings of the individual lexemes. Furthermore, some lexemes have more restrictions than others in terms of combining with other lexemes in syntagms. These issues related to specific lexical combinations will be discussed in the following two sections.

3.2. COLLOCATIONS

A group of words usually found together are called **collocations**. Collocations can be defined as “frequently recurrent, relatively fixed syntagmatic combinations of two or more words” (Bartsch, 2004: 11). They are the proof that linguistic organisation does not rely only on syntactic and semantic properties of lexical items, but also on their co-occurrence. Some words are usually found together, and, in time, they can become fixed expressions, and, thus, pose constraints on other combinations which would be perfectly acceptable both semantically and syntactically.

14 On differences between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, see Cruse (1987).

The English language abounds in collocations. There are various combinations of different parts of speech which collocate, and the commonest types in English are as follows:

- ▶ verb + noun, e.g., *say a prayer*,
- ▶ adjective + noun, e.g., *bright idea*,
- ▶ adverb + verb, e.g., *strongly agree/ disagree*,
- ▶ prepositional phrase a + noun + of, e.g., *a school of fish, a flock of birds*,
- ▶ adjective/ adverb + past participle + noun, e.g., *a newly born baby*.

Collocations are used by native speakers intuitively. Due to their recurrent use, native speakers are aware of their existence and they spontaneously use these fixed expressions, and in time, they become automatised in their language practice. However, due to the restrictions involved in combinations between words, collocations pose a problem for foreign language learners and native speakers who aim to achieve the proficient level of language use. This is particularly challenging for synonymous words which have the same referential meaning but differ in their collocative meanings, and, thus, have restrictions when used in certain combinations. For example, the adjectives **handsome** and *pretty* are synonymous, they have the same referential meaning ‘good-looking’, but they have different collocative meanings when combined with the noun *woman*. Thus a *pretty woman* means ‘good-looking’ woman, but a *handsome woman* means ‘a woman attractive in a strong way’.

3.3. IDIOMS

Idioms are integral part of language. An **idiom** is defined as a group of words whose overall meaning cannot be inferred from the individual meanings of these words. This semantic opaqueness is one of the main characteristics of idioms.

Another important feature of idioms is a significant constraint in terms of grammar and its rules. Namely, idioms are considered to belong to a formulaic language.

The proper and adequate use of idioms in speech shows a certain degree of language fluency, which is particularly required at higher levels. It is estimated that there are around 25,000 idiomatic expressions in the English language, and they represent ordinary manner of language use on the part of native speakers. Although they are perceived by many as mere additions to language expressiveness, aimed to ornament someone’s style in speaking or writing, in cognitive linguistics, they are considered to constitute an important expression of thought and cognition.

For a long time, idioms were studied and defined as fixed expressions. This explanation reflects traditional, or standard, view of semantics of idioms. However, with the development of cognitive linguistics, and cognitive semantics, this traditional view was opposed, and idioms were viewed differently. Consequently, the approach to their study also changed.

The main shift was reflected in the idea that the meaning of most idioms is actually motivated, and it relies on certain semantic patterns that had already existed before they gained the status of an idiomatic expression. Cognitive linguists (George Lakoff being one of the main proponents) claimed that the roots of motivation for idioms can be found in conceptual metaphor, metonymy and conventional knowledge (mainly concerned with the culture of the language).¹⁵

A traditional view treats idioms as pieces of fossilised language, belonging to formulaic language. As such, they are prefabricated, learned and used when needed, without any modifications or productivity mechanisms in terms of semantics or grammar. However, cognitive linguistics opposes this traditional view that idioms are fixed expressions or ‘dead’ metaphors, and approaches the study of idioms relying on the following:

- ▶ idioms express systematic principles
- ▶ idioms are created as a result of cognitive mechanisms
- ▶ idioms are motivated
- ▶ as a result of the above mentioned processes, idiomatic meaning is formed, it is not random.

15 For a detailed description of idioms within cognitive framework, see Lakoff (1980).

We will put aside these differences in approaches towards the explanation of the nature of idioms, and focus on the main characteristics of idiomatic expressions, and how they are perceived in foreign language teaching and learning. Idioms pose a great challenge in applied linguistics, and foreign language teachers and learners find the area of idiomatic expressions rather demanding.

Since an idiom has figurative meaning, it is learned by language users as a whole with a unique meaning. Namely, idioms are learned as single lexical items which have their own form, meaning and usage.

Idioms are considered to be complex lexical units, consisting of two or more elements, which semantically behave as single words. They cannot be interrupted by non-idiomatic content. For example, the idiom “speak of the devil” means that the person who is the subject of a conversation appears at the moment when he/ she has just been mentioned. For example, if we say *Hey Elizabeth, speak of the devil, I was just talking about your new book*, we cannot change any part of it, or add something to it, such as *Hey Elizabeth, speak about the devil**, or *Hey Elizabeth, speak of the beautiful devil**.

The words in idioms cannot be rearranged, even when the idiom contains words of equal status, in the syntactic relation of coordination. For example, the idiom *rain cats and dogs* can be used only in that order, so we cannot say *I'm not leaving the house – it's raining dogs and cats**.

Sometimes idioms are composed of the same words which can also be found in other phrases which do not have idiomatic meaning. The main test which helps us determine whether a string of words represents an idiom or a phrase is as follows: if we can insert a lexical item in the string of words, it can be interpreted as a combination of single elements found together, without their idiomaticity. For example, if we say *He pulled his sister's leg* – this sentence can have both idiomatic (“to tease someone”) and non-idiomatic meaning, but if we say *He pulled his sister's right leg*, this sentence has only non-idiomatic meaning – the literal meaning of physical movement and touching and hurting someone's leg.

To determine whether this group of words is an idiom or a non-idiomatic expression we can employ the following criteria:

- the meaning of a non-idiomatic expression is literal, while the meaning of an idiom is figurative. For example, the sentence *He kicked the bucket* can have both idiomatic and non-idiomatic meaning. The first one refers to the meaning “die”, while the second has literal meaning, meaning “he physically touched and kicked the bucket” (an object, a container used to hold liquids).
- idiomatic expressions are subject to a limited range of grammatical rules. If we say *He kicked the bucket*, meaning “He died”, this sentence cannot be transformed into its equivalent passive construction, while *He kicked the bucket*, conveying the literal meaning can be passive – *The bucket was kicked*.

The study of the origin of idioms can yield rather surprising findings, and provide explanations for their motivation, cognitive mechanisms employed, and cultural background wherein they were created. Many idioms had literal meaning at the time when they were created, but, in time, the meaning changed, and the connection with the original roots has been lost. There are attempts to trace these origins of meanings. However, these analyses are not always reliable, and they belong to folk etymology. There are many interpretations of various idioms belonging to the English language, some of them are rather interesting, unusual or even bizarre.

We will illustrate one of these with the idiom *cost an arm and a leg*, meaning “to be very expensive”. In the past, when there were no cameras to record people's portraits, artists drew and painted people, putting on the canvas only their heads, or one arm and the other one behind their back. It is believed that the price of the painting was determined by the number of limbs painted, and thence, if somebody couldn't afford to have more limbs painted on the canvas, they settled for less, so it “cost him/ her an arm and a leg”.

Another example is the use of the idiom *ABC*. This idiom dates back to the 15th century, when the first spelling and reading books for children were named *ABC*. In time, *ABC* gained metaphorical meanings, and nowadays it means “extremely easy”.

Some idioms are intentionally created to have figurative meaning. A good example which illustrates this phenomenon is the idiom *break your leg*. When we say *Break your leg*, we actually mean “Good luck” – our intention is completely different from what we utter. This idiom can be traced back to the times when people believed that it was bad luck to say something aloud if we wished for good results, and, thus, the opposite was uttered so as not to provoke bad evils or bad luck. This superstition is believed to have particularly existed among actors, so this idiom originated in their profession, and was pronounced before their performance.

Idioms can pose a challenge not only in foreign language teaching and learning, but also in the process of translation, especially when we translate from our mother tongue into the second or foreign language. The adequate translation equivalent is not always easy to find, and misinterpretations and wrong decisions often result from discrepancies existing between the source and the target language in terms of the existing idioms in these languages. In some cases, similar idioms exist in both languages, which make the choice in the target language easier to make. We will illustrate such similarity with the following idioms in English and Serbian:

break a leg: “*slomiti nogu*”,
burn bridges: “*spaliti mostove*”,
break the ice: “*probiti led*”

There are also idioms in languages which do not contain the same or similar lexical items, but, they still contain some elements which could be indicative and helpful for the interpretation of the idiom. Therefore, if we employ some thinking in deciphering them, we can come up with the translation equivalent. The examples which illustrate such idioms are:

be on cloud nine: “*biti na sedmom nebu*”,
to mix apples and oranges: “*mešati babe i žabe*”,
from A to Z: “*od A do Š*”
up to one's armpits: “*biti u problemima do guše*”

There are other idioms which are more problematic to find the equivalent translation for in the target language, due to the fact that the elements of these idioms are not similar in any way. For example, if we say *Yes, and pigs might fly*, we express our doubts that something is unlikely to happen. Although it cannot be literally understood or translated, after a thorough thinking which includes proper understanding of the idiom in English in the first place, and, afterwards, a search for the similar meaning in Serbian, we can come up with the translation equivalent “*kad na vrbi rodi grožđe*”. The following examples illustrate idioms which are not explicitly composed of equivalent elements, and whose meaning can be easily matched:

I got cold feet, meaning “I suddenly became too frightened”: “*Sledio sam se*.”
I got into the swing, meaning “I adjusted”, “I started to understand, enjoy myself”: “*Ušao sam u fazon*”.

However, the most problematic idioms are those which do not have equivalent idiomatic expressions in the target language, and the idiomaticity is then lost in translation. This aspect of discrepancies between languages poses the greatest challenges for translators. Some examples which illustrate idioms which are problematic to translate are as follows:

be in like Flynn (Australian) “seize an opportunity, be successful”, or
excuse (pardon) my French “used to apologise for swearing”.

3.4. SOME BORDERLINE CASES

Although collocations share some characteristics with idioms, these fixed combinations are mainly easy to distinguish from idioms, because each lexical item within a collocation retains its meaning, so the meaning of the collocation is the sum of the meanings of its constituent parts. Collocations have transparent meaning.

However, there are cases when it is not easy to say whether a group of words is a collocation or an idiom due to other aspects involved in their definition. Although collocations have transparent meaning, and each element within it has its own meaning, their meaning is still coherent. The coherence of meaning is also a matter of degree, because there are collocations which look like idioms because of the specific meaning a lexical item can have in the combination with other lexical item.

For example the collocation *foot the bill* looks like an idiomatic expression, and means “to pay for something, especially something expensive”. However, unlike idioms, this collocation is not restricted in grammatical terms, since the noun *bill* can be modified, for example, *He was so upset because he had to foot the electricity bill*. Still, there are grammatical restrictions, which make this combination idiom-like. If we say *He received the bill for electricity*, we cannot reply to this comment by saying *He was upset because he had to foot it**.

There are also different interpretations whether some combinations are idioms or not. Cruse (1987) says that *foot the bill* is a collocation, but Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines this combination as an idiom, while Cambridge English Dictionary does not say anything about the nature of this combination.

Chapter 3: Questions to discuss and exercises

Topic 1: Syntagmatic semantic relations

Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background

1. What characterises paradigmatic/ syntagmatic relationships?
2. What are the common paradigmatic relations?
3. Paradigmatic relations are _____, while _____ relations are characterised by the combinations of two or more words.
4. How can a collocation be defined?
5. What characterises collocations?
6. What are idioms?
7. Semantically, idioms are considered _____
8. In terms of grammar/ syntax, idioms _____
9. In terms of word order, idioms _____
10. Cognitive linguistics views idioms as fixed expressions or “dead” metaphors. True/ False
11. Which criteria can we use if we want to determine whether a string of words is an idiomatic expression?
12. According to cognitive semantics, idioms are motivated expressions. True/ False

Part 2. Application of theory

1. Choose which word collocates with the words in bold.
 - a. Young learners _____ many **exercises** and learn _____ **the time** in English. *do/ perform, telling/ saying*
 - b. The problem is difficult to _____ **under control**. *keep/ hold*
 - c. She has a(n) _____ **knowledge** in the the issue of media literacy. *large/ extensive*
 - d. If he says it once again, I will _____ **crazy**. *go/ become*
 - e. The _____ **drawback** of this project is the lack of resources. *large/ major*
2. Complete the sentences to make collocations.
 - a. Last week, I _____ the exam and passed.
 - b. You would _____ my life much easier if you didnt’ complain so much.
 - c. Our teacher is leaving next month – she is _____ a baby.
 - d. I didn’t expect to be fired – I was _____ surprised.
 - e. I _____ appreciate everything you’ve done for me.
3. Rephrase the sentences by replacing the idioms with their appropriate explanation.
 - a. When she returned home, she saw the mess and immediately **hit the roof**.
 - b. I didn’t want to go to the concert, but Beth **twisted my arm**.
 - c. I knew he was just **pulling my leg** – he couldn’t have met the president.
 - d. I hope we will have enough time **to go the full distance**.
 - e. I would **run a mile** if she asked me to go with them.

4. Match the idioms with the explanations.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| a. hit the sack | 1. to accept criticism or punishment |
| b. go Dutch | 2. not waste time with irrelevant things and deal with the important ones |
| c. face the music | 3. go to bed in order to sleep |
| d. hit the books | 4. share the cost of something |
| e. cut to the chase | 5. to study |

5. Translate the following sentences into English. Identify the collocations.

- Prekršio je zakon i zbog toga je osuđen na 5 godina zatvora.
- Bio je veoma nervozan jer je to bio prvi put da predsedava sastankom.
- Rezultati ankete bili su daleko iznad mojih očekivanja.
- Nakon što sam pažljivo razmotrio sve uslove, prihvatio sam posao.
- Ona ih je stalno ohrabivala da slobodno iskažu svoje mišljenje.

6. Translate the following idioms into Serbian.

- It's all Greek to me.
- My best friend has the Midas touch – any business he starts, it turns out to be a success.
- When she heard the news, she was as cool as a cucumber.
- He always makes a mountain out of a molehill.
- I am getting a bit impatient with him – he is beating around the bush.

7. Use the expressions “cold turkey”, and “on the ball” in sentences where they have

- idiomatic meaning
- non-idiomatic meaning.

8. Apply the criteria for distinguishing idioms from non-idiomatic expressions to explain why **can't see the wood for the trees** is defined as an idiom.

CHAPTER 4: SENTENCE SEMANTICS

4.1. SENTENCE SEMANTICS – INTRODUCTORY NOTES

In the previous chapter we discussed meaning and sense relations pertaining to individual words, studied within the area of lexical semantics. However, semantics, as a science of meaning, also studies meaning within a broader context – a sentence. If the study of meaning revolves around a syntactic structure bigger than a word – phrases or sentences, it belongs to the domain of **sentence semantics**.¹⁶

Although word meaning has been studied thoroughly and extensively within semantics, sentence meaning also represents an important component of linguistic semantics. Individual words have their own meaning, but the concern of semantics is also to explain the meaning of combinations of these words in syntagms and sentences.

The concept of a sentence can be viewed from three different perspectives: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. Defined from the syntactic aspect, a sentence is perceived as a structure characterised by grammatical properties and governed by rules and principles how to combine components which build up such structures, as prescribed in grammar. Semantic aspect implies that a sentence has a certain type of meaning, while pragmatic perspective involves the meaning a sentence has when used in a certain context.

When linguistics gained the status of an independent discipline, and when its sub-disciplines started to develop their own tenets and principles, the above mentioned aspects were viewed separately. Namely, in traditional approach to linguistics, sentence was, and still is, studied within syntax. There are linguists who believe that syntax and semantics are two separate and autonomous disciplines, and should be approached as such in the study of language phenomena. However, there is a growing tendency to view syntax, semantics and pragmatics as disciplines which are closely linked and related to each other, and which, by their very nature of study, mutually intersect and considerably rely on each other.

Noam Chomsky, an American linguist, and thought by many to be the founder of modern linguistics, nicely and clearly compared semantic and syntactic principles, and how they interact. He compared the following pair of expressions:

*Furiously sleep ideas green colorless, and
Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.*

The first structure is syntactically incorrect because it violates the rules of English grammar, while the second one is grammatically correct and well-formed sentence, because it respects the syntactic rule $S = NP + VP$. However, none of them makes any sense, so they are meaningless, but only the second one is a sentence, and the first one being called “a verbal salad” (Chomsky, 1965).

4.2. THE NOTION OF PROPOSITION

A sentence is characterised by various semantic features which incorporate different concepts. One of them relates to the relations holding between verbal and nominal elements within a sentence. The core semantic content of a sentence is called a **proposition**. It is concerned with the **notion of truth**, namely what is true or false. Unlike a sentence which belongs to language, a proposition is independent of language, and refers to the concepts of truth and meaning. A proposition entails the meaning of a sentence.

The notion of a proposition can be illustrated in the following way: the sentences formulated in different languages, e.g. *Water is a colourless liquid*, and “*Voda je tečnost bez boje*” have the same proposition, the true-value related to a characteristic of water, but expressed with different sentences, in two different ways which exist in the English and Serbian language, respectively.

¹⁶ Hurford, et al. (2007) is a good source for a further investigation in sentence semantics.

Another example of a proposition can be illustrated with the phrases/ sentences taken from the same language. Namely, two different sentences in the same language can have the same propositions. The example which illustrates the same proposition expressed in two different sentences in the English language is as follows:

One of my parents works as a waitress.
My mother is a waitress.

In other words, a proposition is thought to contain the meaning of a sentence. Thus, if two sentences have the same meaning, they need to have the same proposition. The notion of proposition is of much concern for the philosophy of language.

4.3. ARGUMENTS AND PREDICATES

A proposition consists of a **predicate** and a **nominal argument**. The predicate-argument structure takes the central part in the understanding of sentence semantics. The study of the notions of predicate and argument relies on the findings in logic, a discipline which classifies elements in the world into entities and relations. These correspond to linguistic notions of arguments and predicates, respectively. In other words, arguments are linguistic, primarily nominal elements which designate some entity or a group of entities from the world around us, while predicates attribute some characteristic to these entities, and express some relation existing between these entities. Arguments, or nouns or noun phrases in grammatical terms, can have different roles, also known as semantic or thematic roles, in relation to their predicates, or verbal elements in a sentence.

4.4. THE TYPES OF SENTENCE MEANINGS

According to the meaning they convey, sentences can be: **analytic**, **contradictory** and **synthetic**.

- ▶ An **analytic** sentence is characterised by the truth it conveys, e.g., *Mice are not birds*.
- ▶ Unlike an analytic sentence, a **contradictory** sentence is necessarily false, e.g., *People are not mammals*.
- ▶ If a sentence is neither analytic nor contradictory, but its inherent true/ false meaning depends on the situation or context, we call it **synthetic**, e.g., *Peter lives in New York*.

Sentences can also be **ambiguous** in meaning. This sense relation corresponds to polysemy and homonymy of words. Unlike lexical ambiguity, sentence ambiguity can result from the ambiguous word or words a sentence contains, or its syntactic structure. The following example illustrates sentence ambiguity:

He went to the bank.

This sentence can be interpreted in two ways:

- “He went to the institution to withdraw some money”, or
- “He went to the bank by the river to relax.”

Another source of sentence ambiguity results from syntactic properties of the sentence. For example, the sentences

Visiting relatives can be rather amusing.

is ambiguous due to the structure of the sentences, not the words themselves. The ambiguity lies in the interpretation of the function of *relatives* – it can be either subject, as a part of the noun phrase *visiting relatives*, but also the object of the verb *visiting*.

Sentence ambiguity can be resolved in context, using not only linguistic but also knowledge of the world. Sentence ambiguity is a valuable source for language creativity, puns and poetic and literary expressions.

Another meaning a sentence can have refers to **anomaly** – if a sentence, although grammatically perfectly correct, is meaningless in terms of reality, we call it **anomalous**. For example, the sentence

Amazing colourful wind is lying along the beach,

is grammatically completely acceptable, but in terms of meaning – it makes no sense.

4.5. SEMANTIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SENTENCES

Not only are there various semantic relations existing among words, but also sentences can be semantically related to other sentences. The basic semantic relationships between sentences are as follows:

- ▶ **paraphrase** – one statement can be paraphrased and expressed in a different way, keeping the same meaning, or “truth conditions”. For example, the statement

John hit Ben really hard

has the same “truth condition” as the statement

Ben was hit really hard by John.

This sentence relation is equivalent to the synonymy relation existing between words.

- ▶ **entailment** – if two statements hold the relationship of entailment, it means that one of them is a logical consequence of the other one. For example,

Amanda lives in Paris

entails that

Amanda lives in France.

The source of entailment in the above mentioned example lies in hyponymy, a relation of inclusion, i.e., *France* is a hyperonym of the noun *Paris*. This example also shows that entailment relies on semantic characteristics of lexical items. The commonest source of entailment is lexical, and the following example illustrates lexical entailment:

- (1) The king was assassinated.
- (2) The king was dead.

The verb *assassinate* includes the semantic component of “dead”, so we can say that the sentence (1) implies the sentence (2).

- ▶ **contradiction** – contradiction involves true-false relationship. Namely, if one statement is true, the other one is false. For example, if we say that

Mary died last year,

it contradicts the sentence

Mary is alive.

- ▶ **presupposition** – a type of sense relation which exists between sentence meanings or propositions, when the meaning of one sentence implies or presupposes the meaning of the other sentence. For example, the sentence

Tom’s mother is a doctor

presupposes that

Tom has a mother.

Entailment and presuppositions are sense relations which share some similarities and differences, and, therefore, it can be problematic to make a clear distinction between the two. The main difference refers to context dependence and logic background – entailment relies on both logic information holding among the elements of the sentence and our knowledge of language, and is context-dependent. On the other hand, presupposition depends on the context wherein a sentence is used/ uttered, and, therefore, presupposition is considered by some linguists to be of much concern for the study of meaning within pragmatics.

Chapter 4: Questions to discuss and exercise

Topic: Sentence semantics

Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background

1. What does sentence semantics study?
2. The core semantic content of a sentence is called a _____, and is concerned with the notion of _____.
3. What does a proposition consist of?
4. What is an argument? What does it designate?
5. What is a predicate? What does it designate?
6. Which types of sentence meanings are there?
7. Sentence ambiguity corresponds to _____ and _____ of words.
8. Anomalous sentence is grammatically _____, but semantically _____.
9. Which semantic relations between sentences have been established?
10. Sometimes it is difficult to make distinction between the following sentence semantic relations: _____ and _____.

Part 2. Application of theory

1. *Identify the arguments and the predicates in the following sentences?*
 - a. The incredible thing happened the other day.
 - b. Everything I have done so far seems so unimportant.
 - c. Moly likes her new job.
 - d. Our team lost from the Beavers.
2. *What does sentence ambiguity rely on in the following examples?*
 - a. Flying planes can be fun.
 - b. Don't worry, I will give you a ring tomorrow.
 - c. I caught my dog in snickers.
 - d. The teacher helped the students with the book.
3. *What type of meaning do the following sentences have?*
 - a. January is the first month of a year.
 - b. Staying at the party is a waste of time.
 - c. Solar energy is a renewable energy source.
 - d. Vegetarians eat meat every day.
 - e. Rebeca is moving to New York next month.
4. *Identify the meaning existing between the following pairs of sentences:*
 - a.1. Steven failed the exam.
a.2. Steven passed the exam.
 - b.1. I didn't leave the party earlier.
b.2. I was at the party.
 - c.1. They printed the last issue of the magazine last week.
c.2. The last issue of the magazine was printed last week.
 - d.1. Peter is flying to London next Friday.
d.2. Peter is travelling next Friday.
 - e.1. Bill lost the lawsuit.
e.2. Bill was involved in a lawsuit.
5. *Write an example of an anomalous sentence.*

CHAPTER 5: GRAMMATICAL MEANING

5.1. FROM SOUND TO MEANING – CLOSING REMARKS

The purview of language analysis encompasses different levels which study units of various sizes and characteristics. The table below represents a general survey of language levels, shown in a bottom-up approach, and their main area of study.

Table 1. Language levels and the focus of their study

Language level	Focus on
phonology and phonetics	sounds
morphology	morphemes, words, word forms
syntax	phrases, sentences
semantics	meaning
pragmatics	language in use

In their description of linguistic phenomena, many linguists use the term ‘grammar’ to refer to all aspects of language study, including phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics (Lyons, 1994). However, a more restricted term of ‘grammar’ includes only morphology and syntax, while other linguistic levels are categorised independently as phonology and semantics.¹⁷ On the other hand, pragmatics involves not only linguistic knowledge, but also different non-linguistic factors, which go beyond grammar and grammatical rules.

Regardless of which terminological option a linguist adopts, what remains as constant and crucial in the study of language is its modular structure, and the subtle interdependence of all language levels. Pertaining to the relation of semantics and other language levels, it was already mentioned in the introductory chapter of this coursebook that semantics defines meanings of language units at different levels – it studies meanings of morphemes, words, phrases and sentences, and therefore, it is related to other linguistic levels, particularly morphology and syntax. Semantics is also closely related to another linguistic discipline – pragmatics – which studies language in use.

In this chapter we will give a brief theoretical summary of the interfaces between semantics and each of these language levels, focusing on the examples which illustrate these connections.

5.1.1. SOUNDS AND MEANING

The smallest unit of sound in speech is called a **phoneme**. It makes distinction between words, and it can bring about the change of meaning, but it does not have the meaning by itself.

The question whether there is a connection between sounds and their meanings has occupied philosophers and linguists for centuries. The widely accepted opinion nowadays relies on Ferdinand de Saussure’s opinion that this connection is primarily of arbitrary nature – the connection between sound and meaning cannot be established - and that there are only few exceptions found in natural languages which could rely on this relatedness.

The most obvious connection between sound and meaning can be found in onomatopoeic words – words which sound like the objects/ referents they name. The following examples illustrate onomatopoeic words in English and their equivalent forms in Serbian:

quack - ‘kva’
ah - ‘ah’
neigh - ‘nji’

¹⁷ Lyons (1994) makes this distinction, using the term ‘grammar’ to refer to both morphology and syntax.

The above mentioned examples illustrate onomatopoeic words which are rather similar in both languages. However, there are onomatopoeic words which sound completely different in different languages, which seems peculiar because these sounds are completely the same in nature, no matter which language should describe them. This shows how language and its rules influence the perception of the listener in formulating these onomatopoeic words. The following examples illustrate such discrepancies of how these words sound to English and Serbian native speakers:

hiss - 'siktati'
oink - 'grok'
woof - 'av'

5.1.2. GRAMMATICAL SEMANTICS

The main focus of the previous chapters of this coursebook was on lexical semantics, the study of meaning of 'content' words, i.e., words which have lexical meaning, such as *adorable, flower, bake*, etc. However, semantics also studies grammatical elements and categories, and the meaning they have, which is relevant primarily for morphology and syntax, and this branch of semantics is known as grammatical semantics (Cruse, 1987).

Grammatical semantics is "the study of meaning conveyed by grammatical device", and it can be subdivided into semantics of morphology and semantics of syntax (Wierzbicka 1988: 3). The main idea underlying grammatical semantics is that every grammatical element or category bears a certain meaning which is important for a proper understanding of language constructs. For example, in English derivational morphology, we add various affixes, which have their own meanings, to create new words. The following examples illustrate the process of affixation and the meanings the stated affixes have:

cardi-, combines with words to denote the meaning of 'heart', e.g., cardiologist, cardiograph,
-cide, combines with words to denote the meaning of 'killing', e.g., insecticide, patricide,
-like, combines with nouns to form adjectives with the meaning 'similar to', e.g., childlike, ladylike, prison-like.

The example that follows illustrates how grammar and grammatical rules affect the meaning of the whole sentence: depending on the complement to the verb *remember*, whether it is infinitive or gerund, the sentence has different meanings:

I remember inviting him to our meeting, means "I did invite him to the meeting, and now I recall this event", while
Please, remember to invite him to the meeting, means "don't forget to do this".

This pair of sentences illustrates how semantics and syntax are closely related and dependent, because the meaning of the whole construct depends on grammatical properties of the elements, not the mere meanings of the lexemes.

Sometimes it is difficult to make a clear distinction whether a language phenomenon belongs to morphology or syntax, and these cases support the use of the umbrella term 'grammar' to refer to both. This can be illustrated by the following examples:

- a) The boy's been here twice.
- b) The boy's father has been here.
- c) The boy's very shy.
- d) The boys' parents live in Brazil.

The first sentence illustrates the use of the shortened form 's of the auxiliary verb *have* (*has*); the meaning of the 'apostrophe s' form is possessive in sentences b) and d), while in the c) sentence, the shortened form 's illustrates the use of the auxiliary verb *be* (*is*).

Chapter 5: Questions to discuss and exercises

Topic: Grammatical semantics

Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background

1. *Finish the following statements:*

- (a) The smallest unit of sound in speech is called _____.
- (b) The main area of the study in phonology is _____.
- (c) Morphology is _____, which studies _____.
- (d) Syntax is concerned with the study of _____ and _____.
- (e) The main area of the study in phonology is _____.
- (f) The connections between sound and meaning is arbitrary, which means that _____.
- (g) In terms of meaning, onomatopoeic words can illustrate _____.
- (h) Grammatical semantics includes _____, and it studies _____.
- (i) "Grammar", in its narrow sense, includes only _____ and _____.

Part 2. Application of theory

1. *Identify the phonemes which bring about the differences in meaning between the following pairs of words:*

- (a) sit – pit
- (b) brat – brag
- (c) play – pray
- (d) mean – meet
- (e) hall - whole

2. *Use a dictionary and find the equivalent forms in Serbian for the following onomatopoeic words:*

- (a) "ouch"
- (b) "belch"
- (c) "burp"
- (d) "meow"
- (e) "chirp"

3. *Use the onomatopoeic words from the previous exercise in meaningful sentences.*

4. *Analyse the following pairs of sentences and*

- a. *circle those elements which bring about the differences in meaning between these sentences,*
- b. *define the grammatical categories which are responsible for these differences, and*
- c. *explain the meanings of these categories.*

A. 1. He has been working for the company for 20 years.

A. 2. He worked for the company for 20 years.

B. 1. He has a little free time.

B. 2. He has little free time.

C. 1. He stopped smoking.

C. 2. He stopped to smoke.

- D. 1. I am going to see a doctor.
D. 2. I am going to see the doctor.

- E. 1. This is my friend's house.
E.2. This is my friends' house.

- F. 1. She is a most beautiful girl.
F. 2. She is the most beautiful girl.

5. *Use a dictionary and explain the meanings of the following affixes:*

extra-
under-
pro-
-wise
-esque
-en

6. *Use the affixes from the previous exercise to form at least two words which will illustrate the meaning the affixes have in these newly formed words.*

CHAPTER 6: MEANING AND THE USE OF LANGUAGE

6.1. BEYOND LINGUISTIC MEANING – INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Meaning is closely related with the use of language. Linguistic meaning can be complemented by the meaning of context, speakers and referents. In the previous chapters we expanded on the domain of semantics to the level of sentence. As we have mentioned several times before, in order to understand the meaning of a sentence, it is often necessary to know the context wherein the sentence is used, or uttered, which brings us to the domain of pragmatics.

Pragmatics is a linguistic discipline which studies the use of language and the influence the context has on meaning. It also deals with the intentions of speakers and the effects the communicative acts have on the listeners. While semantics deals with all possible meanings of sentences, pragmatics is concerned with a specific meaning in the given context. In other words, pragmatics studies the meaning of contextualised sentences, or utterances.¹⁸

The term pragmatics, as perceived in modern linguistic theory, was first used by the American philosopher Charles Morris, whose main concern of study was the field of semiotics. Within semiotics, he distinguished three main areas of investigation – syntax, semantics and pragmatics. His work was characterised by the first systematic investigation of meaning within the framework of these three disciplines, and his studies were followed by many others which opposed, supported or supplemented his views on the relation of pragmatics and other linguistic and non-linguistic disciplines.

As a result of various approaches to the study of pragmatics, there are different views what the scope of pragmatics includes. Due to the main area of interest and the aim of this coursebook, the main concepts studied within pragmatics will be just introduced, and pragmatics will be compared to semantics, within the framework of their mutual correlations and connections.

6.2. PRAGMATICS AND SEMANTICS

Semantics and **pragmatics** are both linguistic disciplines concerned with meaning, and although they are clearly defined, it is not often easy to delineate a strict boundary between them, especially when we get into details in our study and a deeper analysis of meaning.

Meaning is not only related to language and its complexities, but it also depends on the real world that surrounds us, and the knowledge we have about this world. The domain of both disciplines overlap, and they also can be viewed as complementary disciplines, whose principles and findings can contribute to a better understanding of meaning perceived from different aspects.

The best examples which illustrate the slippery line between semantics and pragmatics are the concepts of entailment, presupposition, implicature, which are studied in semantics, but also redefined and given a specific concern within pragmatics.

We defined presupposition as a sentence sense relation, but also mentioned that some linguists think that presupposition should be studied within pragmatics. The nature of presupposition once again shows that a strict distinction between semantics and pragmatics cannot be made. In pragmatics, **presupposition** represents a type of pragmatic inference. Namely, when we use language in communication, we rely a lot on information which is not explicitly stated, i.e., we presuppose that the listener, or reader, has this previous knowledge. This means that in communication, the speaker assumes that the interlocutor has the background information, i.e., a lot is taken for granted.

18 For a further investigation in pragmatics, see Levinson (1983).

Presupposition can be illustrated by the following examples:

My brother lives in Paris.

Presupposition: There is a man who is my brother.

She doesn't work in this company anymore.

Presupposition: She used to work for this company.

Semantics deals with those aspects of meaning which are constant and do not vary in terms of their dependence on the context – they are rooted in language and are related to linguistic meaning. On the other hand, pragmatics relies on the linguistic meaning and studies how it is used in context and how both the speaker and the hearer combine linguist knowledge with other context-related elements and their world knowledge in order to convey or infer the intended meaning.

In the introductory chapter of this coursebook, sentence and utterance, as the key concepts in semantics, were explained and contrasted. The difference between a sentence and an utterance can be more clearly perceived from a pragmatic aspect. Namely, a sentence is a unit of the language system, an abstract formation, a string of words combined together with the respect of grammatical rules of language. On the other hand, an utterance, be it a word, phrase, or sentence, is the realisation of the sentence in communication. Utterances can be both complete and incomplete, grammatically correct or incorrect. Either way, their meaning can be clear and properly understood in context.

6.3. MEANING AND CONTEXT

A speaker and a hearer use both linguistic knowledge and the context in order to infer meaning. There are three types of sources of knowledge we can employ in order to understand and interpret the meaning of a sentence/ a part of the sentence or a text used in a certain context:

1. knowledge we have about the physical context;
2. knowledge we gain from what has already been said,
3. common, background knowledge

The first source of knowledge is available from the physical context, and it includes deictic expressions. For example, the meaning of the utterance “*Leave it here*” can be properly interpreted only if we know what “*here*” refers to.

The second source of knowledge is important if we are to interpret the meaning of a sentence composed of elements which refer to something that has previously been said, and, thus, we need to know what they actually refer to, i.e., we need to know **the discourse topic** (what the discourse or the text is about). For example, if we want to understand the meaning of the utterance

“*So he went to the bank*”,

we need a wider context, and if this context is

“He was so busy and worked overtime for days, spending hours in a tight space of his office.

He became tired and he realised he needed some open space and fresh air in the nature”, the interpretation of the utterance would be

“He went to the bank, by the river”.

And the last source of knowledge – the common, background knowledge – considerably contributes to the inferring of meaning. It includes knowledge of the world, and can be culturally and individually conditioned.

Another communication situation shows how important the background knowledge is, and it can be illustrated with the following utterance exchange:

One person says: "Let's go to your favourite restaurant and order a stake",

and the other person replies

"It's Wednesday".

In order to understand this communication situation in a proper way, we include the following information in the interpretation of the second utterance:

1. cultural information – in orthodox tradition, Wednesday is the day when the believers do not eat meat, and
2. personal information – the person who responds to the first utterance respects this tradition.

The following example illustrates how context and non-linguistic elements define the utterance, even though it is not complete. If we meet someone and we are guessing who that person is, we can say the name of that person in the rising intonation, e.g., "Mark?". This is an incomplete utterance, shortened from "Are you Mark?", but the communicative situation is clear enough so that we can understand the meaning of the incomplete utterance. If the context is different, and the utterance is preceded by the question "Who won the competition?", we can also use the incomplete utterance "Mark", which is, in this communicative situation, shortened from "Mark won the competition."

Although some statements are grammatically incorrect, their meaning can also be well understood when used in specific contexts, and therefore the context helps to shape and give grammatically incorrect sentence the right and intended meaning.

As it was described in the previous chapter, a sentence can be ambiguous in meaning, and this ambiguity can result either from the ambiguity of the word or words composing the sentence or from the syntactic structure of the sentence. For a proper understanding of such statement, we need to have both the context and language related knowledge.

The following example can illustrate the importance of context and communicative situation for a proper understanding of the conversation, which, at first sight, sounds illogical. The expected answer to the question

"Do you know where my phone is?"

would be

"Yes, I do", or

"No, I don't."

However, if the answer is

"I see John playing in the corner",

it makes sense in the context which includes the following elements: John is the speaker's child who uses every opportunity to take his parents' phone, steal away, and, crouched in the corner, play video games on the phone. With this background information, the answer would mean,

"Yes, I know, it is in the corner. John has got it."

However, the answer as a linguistic expression has a different meaning outside the previously described context.

Even those statements which have rather clear and unambiguous meaning can be interpreted differently depending on the context and circumstances wherein they are used. We will illustrate the importance and influence of context while interpreting the meaning of an utterance with the following example:

"It is freezing outside."

This utterance has an explicit meaning of the weather condition. However, in terms of the purpose why it was uttered, it can be interpreted in different ways. The following interpretations illustrate some of the meanings of the utterance.

1. "So I'd rather stay at home."
2. "We need to put on some warm clothes before we go out."
3. "Our friends probably won't come because they never leave their house in such weather."
4. "I need to bring in the vases with flowers."

As the above examples illustrate, pragmatics studies what goes beyond explicit meaning, what is indirectly stated, involving the speaker's intention and how a listener decodes the message. One of the key concepts in pragmatics refers to **inference** – a type of reasoning, a process of reaching a conclusion based on some evidence. Inference has an important role in connecting meaning to the context. Namely, for a proper understanding of an utterance, we need to have not only the language and context-related knowledge, but also the awareness of the intention of the speaker, which refers to a very important aspect of pragmatics – speech acts.

The theory of speech acts, originating from philosophy of language, contributes to the study of language from pragmatic perspective. **Speech act** refers to the act we perform while uttering a sentence in a certain communicative situation, and is connected with the intention the speaker involves and the effect the utterance has on the listener. Speech acts are very important in communication.

Furthermore, in order to interpret the relationship between language and context better and more effectively and precisely, it is important to understand the use of deictic expressions, or **deixis**, in communication.

Deixis is a term originating from the Greek language, meaning "demonstration" or "indicating", "reference". Deixis refers to words which accomplish their full meaning when contextualised, i.e., when used in a particular context.

The typical examples of deictic words are *personal* and *demonstrative pronouns, adverbial words* and *phrases*, but also other grammatical elements whose meaning is clear from the context.

For example, the demonstrative pronoun *this* has variable meanings in context depending on the referent it addresses. If we say "Take this away", and point to the *table* "this" has the meaning of a table, and if we say "Take this one", and we point to the chair, then the meaning of the demonstrative pronoun *this* is a "chair".

If the deictic information is absent from the communicative act, the receiver of the information cannot understand it properly, or he can even misunderstand the message. For example, if we come to someone's office and find the notice "I will be back in one hour", we do not know when exactly this notice was put up, and when the clock started ticking. As a result of the absence of deictic information related to "one hour", we can wait for a couple of seconds up to almost one hour.

Another deictic use is illustrated by the spatial deixis *here/ there* which indicates the location of the speaker in comparison to the specified place. If we say "Don't sit there – move a bit closer, next to me – yes, here", the meaning of the adverbs *here* and *there* is clear only in the context wherein the statement has been uttered.

The notion of deixis also nicely illustrates the distinction between semantics and pragmatics – when meaning belongs to language, and when language information needs to be supplemented by the use in context wherein this meaning is actualised.

And, finally, a very important aspect of pragmatics refers to the notion of **conversational implicature**, or just **implicature**. The phenomenon of implicature reveals how important context is in actualisation and understanding of linguistic structures. Implicatures contain information contained in the utterance but not explicitly stated. It also contributes to economy in communication because if we state something which implies additional information, we do not have to state this information explicitly. The exchange of information stated in the following pair of utterances illustrates the use of implicature in conversation:

- A. *Did you buy some bread?*
- B. *The bakery was closed.*

The answer implies that the answer is "No".

All the above mentioned concepts show the complexity of meaning, and how it is important to employ a variety of elements – which belong to both linguistic and non-linguistic area – if we aim at a proper understanding of a diverse corpus of possible utterances. This last chapter, although of an introductory nature, contributes to a deeper understanding of meaning in language, and opens the door to an amazing world of meaning, which is still to be pursued and discovered by those keen to find out more about the intricacies of meaning in language and real life world.

Chapter 6: Questions to discuss and exercises

Topic: Meaning and the use of language

Part 1. Questions related to theoretical background

1. What does pragmatics study?
 2. Circle the word which best fits into the following descriptions: Semantics deals with those aspects of meaning which are *constant/ variable* and, depending on the context, can *change/ do not change*.
Pragmatics relies on the linguistic meaning and studies how it is used in *language/ context*.
3. A speaker and a hearer use both _____ and _____ in order to infer meaning.
4. What does speech act refer to?
5. What are the typical examples of deictic words?
6. What is inference?
7. What does presupposition mean?
8. Explain the difference between sentence and utterance from a pragmatic point of view.

Part 2. Application of theory

1. Analyse the following examples, and decide what kind of act the speaker performs while uttering these sentences.
 - (a) "I apologise for being late."
 - (b) "I pronounce you husband and wife."
 - (c) "I kindly ask you to stay with us a bit longer."
 - (d) "I assure you I will finish the assignment on time."
 - (e) "I really appreciate your kindness."
 - (f) "Can you say it again, please?"
2. What are the possible intentions of the speaker when he utters the following sentences:
 - (a) "There is a glass on the table."
 - (b) "He turned 21 last Friday."
3. Identify deictic elements in the following sentences:
 - (a) "Don't leave it there!"
 - (b) "I am very busy this week."
 - (c) "I invited Ava to come, but she was too busy."
4. What do the following utterances presuppose:
 - (a) "Jack apologised for being so rude."
 - (b) "When did you graduate from the university?"
 - (c) "If only I had not forgotten about my sister's birthday."
 - (d) "Mike failed the exam."
 - (e) "He didn't want to make the same mistake."
 - (f) "I wish I were more patient with them"

BIBLIOGRAPHY



- Ayto, J. (2009). *Oxford Dictionary of English Idioms*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Hurford, R. J., et al. (2007). *Semantics. A Coursebook*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bartsch, S. (2004). *Structural and Functional Properties of Collocations in English*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Bloomfield, W. M. & L. Newmark. (1963). *An Introduction to the History of English*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
- Breal, M. (1900). *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning*. New York: H. Hold & Company.
- Brinton, J. L. (2000). *The Structure of Modern English. A Linguistic Introduction*. Philadelphia: University of British Columbia.
- Bugarski, R. (1996). *Uvod u opštu lingvistiku*. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Collins Cobuild English Guides 2. *Word Formation* (1994). London: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Collins English Dictionary (1995). 3rd ed. Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Cruse, A. D. (1987). *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2008). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. 6th ed. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Dorđević, R. (1997). *Gramatika engleskog jezika*. Beograd: Čigoja štampa.
- Durkin, P. (2009). *The Oxford Guide to Etymology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kempson, M. R. (1996). *Semantic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G. & M. Johnson. (1980). *Metaphors We Live by*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Levinson, C. S. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lipka, L. (2002). *English Lexicology. Lexical Structure, Word Semantics & Word-formation*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Lyons, J. (1981). *Language and Linguistics. An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyons, J. (1994). *Semantics. Volume 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyons, J. (1996). *Semantics. Volume 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McMahon, A. M. S. (1999). *Understanding Language Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Murphy, M. L. (2010). *Lexical Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Noth, W. (1995). *Handbook of Semiotics*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Ogden, C. K., I. A. Richards (1923). *The Meaning of Meaning. A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*. New York: A Harvest Book.
- Palmer, F. R. (1981). *Semantics*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Saussure, F. (2011). *Course in General Linguistics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Stockwell, R. D. Minkova. (2006). *English Words. History and Structure*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Valenzuela, J. (2017). *Meaning in English. An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wierzbicka, A. (1988). *The Semantics of Grammar*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Škiljan, D. (1985). *Pogled u lingvistiku*. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.

Online resources

Cambridge Dictionary. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

Merriam-Webster Dictionary. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

Online Oxford Collocation Dictionary. Retrieved from <http://www.freecollocation.com/search1?word=free>



Valentina Gavranović

TOWARDS A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF MEANING IN LANGUAGE

A COURSEBOOK IN ENGLISH SEMANTICS

This coursebook has been written for undergraduate students majoring in English, with the aim to introduce them with the main concepts found in the domain of semantics, and help them understand the complexities and different aspects of meaning in language. Although the book is primarily intended for students who have no previous theoretical knowledge in semantics, it can also be used by those who want to consolidate and expand on their existing learning experience in linguistics and semantics.

The scope of concepts and topics covered in this book have been framed within a rounded context which offers the basics in semantics, and provides references and incentives for students' further autonomous investigation and research. The author endeavoured to present complex linguistic issues in such a way that any language learner with no previous knowledge in this area can use the book. However, anyone who uses this book needs to read it very carefully so that they could understand the theory and apply it while tackling the examples illustrating the concepts provided in this book. Furthermore, the very nature of linguistics demands a thorough and careful reading, rereading and questioning.

The book is composed of six chapters, and, within them, there are several sections and subsections. Each chapter contains theoretical explanations followed by a set of questions and exercises whose aim is to help the learners revise the theoretical concepts and apply them in practice.