What is Semantics?

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- Semantics is the technical term used to refer to the study of meaning.
  This term is a recent addition to the English language. One of the earliest uses of the term was in 1894, in a paper entitled:
  "Reflected meanings: a point in semantics." In this case, the term was used to refer not to meaning only but to its development which is what we call now "historical semantics".

- In 1900, a book called "Semantics: studies in the science of meaning" was published. The term Semantics was treated in this book the way we use it today, to refer to the "science" of meaning not the changes of meaning from a historical point of view.

- **The use of the word "semantics" in popular language:**

  In popular language, especially in newspapers, the word "semantics" is used to refer to the manipulation of language, mostly to mislead by choosing the right word. For example, the following headline in *The Guardian* in 1971:

  "Semantic manoeuvres at the Pentagon".
  In this article the term "*mobile manoeuvre*" was being used to mean "retreat".

What is "meaning"?

- "Meaning" covers a variety of aspects of language, and there is no general agreement about the nature of meaning.
  Looking at the word itself, the dictionary will suggest a number of different meanings of the noun "meaning" and the verb "mean".

- The word mean can be applied to people who use language, i.e. to speakers, in the sense of "intend". And it can be applied to words and sentences in the sense of "be equivalent to".
  To understand what meaning is, one has to keep in mind whether we are talking about what speakers mean or what words (or sentences)mean.

- Utterance Meaning (Speaker Meaning) is what a speaker means (i.e. intends to convey)when he uses a piece of language. It includes the secondary aspects of meaning, <u>especially those related to context</u>.

- Sentence Meaning (or Word Meaning) is what a sentence (or word) means, i.e. what it <u>counts as the equivalent of </u>in the language concerned.

Example:

"Nice day."
This sentence is equivalent to something like "This is a lovely day."
However, depending on the situation and the speaker's facial expressions, tone of voice, or the relationship that exists between the speaker and hearer, it can mean the exact opposite, **i.e.** "This is not a nice day."

- From what we discussed above, it becomes clear that there is a distinction between what would seem to be the usual meaning of a word or a sentence, and the meaning it has in certain specific circumstances or contexts. It is this distinction that allows us to say one thing and mean another.
  This is a difference between Semantics and Pragmatics.

What is Pragmatics?

- Pragmatics is the study of meaning that a sentence has in a particular context in which it is uttered.

- As we mentioned earlier, the difference between Semantics and Pragmatics is that the study of Semantics is independent of context.
  e.g. There's a car coming.

- This sentence out of context simply gives information that a car is coming, but in a specific context it can be understood as a warning.

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