

Semantics: Practical Applications

In our previous lectures, we discussed a number of topics related to semantics. We will cover topics related to pragmatics in the coming lectures.

Before we move to pragmatics, however, we will look at a number of practical exercises that will help us apply our knowledge of the theoretical aspects we have been discussing so far in this course.

- If you need more practice, you can find more of these exercises in your reference book *Semantics: A Course Book*.

Binary Antonymy

To identify **binary antonyms**, we can test antonymous pairs by seeing if the negative of one term is the equivalent to (or entails) the other. Thus, “dead” and “alive” are binary antonyms because if something is not dead then it must be alive. Use this test to determine which of the following pairs in the exercise are binary antonyms.

Exercise 1: Binary Antonymy

Are the following pairs binary antonyms?

- | | |
|------------------------|----------|
| 1- chalk – cheese | Yes / No |
| 2- same – different | Yes / No |
| 3- copper – tin | Yes / No |
| 4- dead – alive | Yes / No |
| 5- married – unmarried | Yes / No |
| 6- love – hate | Yes / No |

Exercise 1: Answers

(1) No, if something is not chalk, it is not necessarily cheese. (2) Yes, if two things are the same, they are not different; and if they are not the same, they are different. (3) No
(4) Yes (5) Yes (6) No, if you don't love someone, you don't necessarily hate him.

Converses

We mentioned that if a word describes a relationship between two things (or people) and another word describes the same relationship when the two things (or people) are mentioned in the opposite order, then the two words are **converses** of each other. For example, “parent” and “child” are converses, because X is the parent of Y (one order) describes the same relationship as Y is the child of X (opposite order).

Exercise 2 (A): Converses

Are the following pairs of expressions converses?

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| 1- below – above | Yes / No |
| 2- grandparent – grandchild | Yes / No |
| 3- love – hate | Yes / No |
| 4- conceal – reveal | Yes / No |
| 5- greater than – less than | Yes / No |
| 6- own – belong to | Yes / No |

Exercise 2 (A): Answers

(1) Yes, if X is below Y then Y is above X. (2) Yes (3) No (4) No (5) Yes (6) Yes

Exercise 2 (B): Converses

Are the following pairs of expressions converses?

- | | |
|---|----------|
| 1- If <u>John</u> bought <u>a car</u> from <u>Fred</u> , is it the case that Fred sold a car to John? | Yes / No |
| 2- Are <i>buy</i> and <i>sell</i> converses? | Yes / No |
| 3- Are <i>borrow</i> and <i>lend</i> converses? | Yes / No |
| 4- Are <i>give</i> and <i>take</i> converses? (Careful!) | Yes / No |
| 5- Are <i>come</i> and <i>go</i> converses? | Yes / No |

Exercise 2 (B): Answers

- (1) Yes (2) Yes (3) Yes, if X borrows something from Y, Y lends that thing to X.
 (4) No, if X takes something from Y, Y does not necessarily give that thing to X (for example, X might take it without Y's permission), so give and take are not exact converses, although they almost meet the definition.
 (5) No, if someone goes to the mountain, the mountain does not come to him.

Gradable Antonyms

We mentioned that a good test for gradability, i.e. having a value on some continuous scale, is to see whether a word can combine with "very", or "very much", or "how?" or "how much?" For example, "How tall is he?" is acceptable, but "How top is that shelf?" is not generally acceptable. Thus, "tall" is gradable, but "top" is not gradable. Try to apply this test to the following exercises.

Exercise 3: Gradable Antonyms

Are the following pairs gradable antonyms?

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------|
| 1- tall – short | Yes / No |
| 2- long – short | Yes / No |
| 3- clever – stupid | Yes / No |
| 4- top – bottom | Yes / No |
| 5- love – hate (Careful!) | Yes / No |

Exercise 3: Answers

- (1) Yes (2) Yes (3) Yes (4) No
 (5) Yes, we can say "How much do you love/hate *something*?"

Exercise 4: Antonymy

Classify the following pairs as binary antonyms (B), converses (C), or gradable antonyms (G).

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| 1- easy – difficult | B / C / G |
| 2- good – bad | B / C / G |
| 3- pass – fail | B / C / G |
| 4- husband – wife | B / C / G |
| 5- parent – offspring | B / C / G |
| 6- legal – illegal | B / C / G |

Exercise 4: Answers

1. G 2. G 3. B 4. C 5. C 6. B

Homonymy and Polysemy

In the case of **homonymy**, we have two words whose senses are far apart from each other and not obviously related to each other in any way. While in the case of **polysemy**, we have one word which has several very closely related senses (the different senses are related to each other in some way).

Let us apply this to the following exercise.

Exercise 5: Homonymy and Polysemy

Decide whether the following words are examples of homonymy (H) or polysemy (P).

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1- bark (of a dog vs. of a tree) | H / P |
| 2- fork (in a road vs. instrument for eating) | H / P |
| 3- tail (of a coat vs. of an animal) | H / P |
| 4- steer (to guide vs. young bull) | H / P |
| 5- lip (of a jug vs. of a person) | H / P |

Exercise 5: Answers

(1)H, not obviously related to each other in any way (2) P, the two senses are related by the concept of branching out into different parts or parts. (3) P, the two senses have the concept of being located at the end of something. (4) H, not obviously related to each other in any way (5) P, the two senses have the concept of being at the edge of an hollow opening.

Semantic Fields & Collocation

A **semantic field** contains a group of words which are related in their meaning.

Collocation is a relationship between words that specifically or habitually go together.

Exercise 1: Semantic Fields

Identify the word that does not belong to the group and suggest a suitable semantic field for the group.

- 1- banana, apple, orange, apricot, flower
- 2- uncle, aunt, friend, grandmother, cousin
- 3- car, ship, plane, lake, boat
- 4- honesty, reliability, generosity, truthfulness
- 5- running, swimming, thinking, skating

Exercise 1: Answers

(1) Semantic Field: "fruit", the word "flower" is not part of this semantic field (2) Semantic Field: "relatives", the word "friend" is not part of this semantic field. (3) Semantic Field: "means of transportation", the word "lake" is not part of this semantic field. (4) Semantic Field: virtues, all words belong to the field. (5) Semantic Field: "sports", the word "thinking" is not part of this semantic field.

Exercise 2: Collocation

Decide whether the following pairs of words make a collocation.

- | | |
|--------------------|----------|
| 1- have fun | Yes / No |
| 2- get place | Yes / No |
| 3- take place | Yes / No |
| 4- problem solving | Yes / No |
| 5- problem care | Yes / No |
| 6- health care | Yes / No |

Exercise 2: Answers

(1) Yes (2) No (3) Yes (4) Yes (5) No (6) Yes

Notes: _____

