

## Studying sense relations: A comparative linguistic study of animal's people and gifted

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### Abstract

The present article is tied to the concepts needed to understand what it means for the term sense relations. It deals with some of the principles which are required to take an account of how languages organize and express meanings. In this article the complex phenomenon of the sense relations and meaning is focused on in detail. The focus has been on when and why the speaker or writer feels the need to create sense relationships by using certain devices, how a speaker/writer picks up a property of an item from a certain field and attaches it to the item of another field, how the same word connotes new messages in response to new situations and new experiences and finally how the innovative semantic structure is applied to convey his/her intended meaning.

**Keywords:** semantics, arbitrariness, contextual meaning, utterance, deconstruction, incompatibility, meronymy

### Introduction

Language is a system, and not just a heap of words. Natural languages are symbolic systems with properties and principles of their own, and it is precisely those properties and principles that determine the way in which the linguistic sign functions as a sign. Language is for communicating about the world outside of language. Semantics is the science of meaning. It is a systematic study of meaning, and linguistic semantics is the study of how languages organize and express meanings. There are three theories concerned with the systematic study of 'meaning' psychology, philosophy and linguistics. Their interests may be different, yet each helps the other. Psychology studies how an individual human being learns, it concerns with retaining, recalling, or losing information process in a human mind; it helps to classify, make judgment and solve problem and finally in other words, thanks to psychology, the human mind seeks meanings and works with them. Philosophers of language are concerned with how we know, how any particular fact that we know or accept as true is related to other possible facts—what must be antecedent (a presupposition) to that fact and what is a likely consequence, or entailment of it; what statements are mutually contradictory, which sentences express the same meaning in different words, and which are unrelated. Linguists want to understand how language works. Just what common knowledge two persons possess when they share a language—English, Hindi, or whatever—that makes it possible for them to give and get information, to express their feelings and their intentions to one another, and to be understood with a fair degree of success. Linguistics is concerned with identifying the meaningful elements of specific languages. This freedom from context is possible only because language is conventional, or has the feature of arbitrariness. Because language is creative, our communication is not restricted to a fixed set of topics; we constantly produce and understand new messages in response to new situations and new experiences. It is impossible to explore semantics without also dealing with syntax (and vice versa) because the two are closely interrelated: the meaning of a sentence is more than the meanings of the words it contains,

and the meaning of a word often depends partly on the company it keeps—what other words occur in the same sentence.

*Words are not facts of nature like rocks and trees, but cultural objects, products of the human brain. As such, the relationship between any string of sounds and the meaning they represent is completely conventional* <sup>[1]</sup>. The general level of meaning, which is available to all of us, can be called the sentence meaning, or sense, of the string. The fuller, contextual meaning, which we get from knowing all the circumstances in which it is uttered, can be called utterance meaning, or force. What a word 'connotes, is much less stable and more indeterminate than what it 'denotes'. Connotative meaning is more open-ended than conceptual. What a word connotes often gives a clearer insight into social and cultural attitudes than what it conceptually means.

### Specificity in the texts

Indra Sinha like Lalwani is second to none in conveying both word meaning and the meaning of utterances and in creating sense relationships by using certain devices. The use of *blue kingfishers* for the sparking truth/story is one such example where Sinha picks up a property of animate and attaches it to something inanimate/abstract. The focus is on not what a word refers to, but the sense that it makes – the way one relates meaning within the framework of language. Both the writers broaden the linguistic framework of the English language, which has been acknowledged, accepted and appreciated. Perhaps having deconstruction in some corner of their mind, they restructure the structure. Their semantic structure is innovative, which means not destroying the old ones, but creating variants of lexemes, graphemes and phonemes – the sophistications/updates for the ones in use.

### Major sense relations

Let us first have a look at the sense relations that have been most extensively discussed: synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, hyponymy, incompatibility, homonymy and meronymy.

## 1. Synonymy

It is a relationship of semantic identity, either between readings of a word or between words. The first perspective involves comparing words with their full range of applications, the second comparing words as they appear with a specific reading in a specific sentence. In both cases, the relationship may be complete or partial. The argument which we are pursuing here is a natural consequence of the existence of words within semantic fields. A field is an area of meaning which coheres around a topic or concept, what we are observing here is the phenomenon of synonymy, or sameness of sense. But the fact is that synonymy can only really exist in the linguistic system as similarity not sameness of meaning.

If synonymy is defined as a relationship between words in context, two items are synonymous if they may be substituted for each other in a given context, while retaining the semantic value of the expression as a whole.

If synonymy is defined as a relationship between words, total synonymy implies that the synonyms, first, have the same range of meanings and, second, are substitutable for each other in all relevant contexts without changing the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

*'Tonight, this very night, I am to get my heart's desire...'*<sup>[2]</sup> (Animal's People 235)

*...he is not helpless, that he possesses the invincible, undefeatable power of zero.* (Animal's People 229)

In the above quotes the words 'Tonight' and 'this very night', and 'invincible' and 'undefeatable' are total synonymous as they can be replaced without changing the meaning of the sentences concerned as a whole.

*She is walking on a path thick with dust, feeling joyous – so happy she skips now and then*<sup>[3]</sup>, (Gifted 35).

*...a plane almost going down in the Indian Ocean due to a tiny error on the part of the pilot, or small riot in a mosque on the border with Pakistan;* (Gifted 11)

*MKG is the real deal, man, Mohandas K, Gandy, the don, the number one. He's the original gangster without gun, ...*(Gifted 65)

Partial synonymy between words in a context exists if substitutable items differ in some aspects of their meaning. This is particularly clear when non-denotational aspects of meaning, like emotive or stylistic shades of meaning, are at stake.

*... I shall be free of myself, of grief, pain ...* (Animal's People 238)

In the above quote the words 'grief' and 'pain' are partial synonymous because the word 'pain' means physical suffering or discomfort caused by illness or injury while the word 'grief' means deep sorrow especially caused by someone's death.

*...creatures of all shapes and colours are floating and drifting.* (Animal's People 223)

Again in the above quote the words 'float' and 'drift' are partial synonymous because the word 'float' means to move on or near the surface of a liquid without sinking while the word 'drift' means be carried slowly by a current of air or water.

*I'm moving to a country where people laugh and have fun and aren't cruel and rude.* (Gifted 24)

Here also the words 'cruel' and 'rude' are partial synonymous because the word 'cruel' means causing pain or suffering while the word 'rude' means offensively impolite or ill mannered.

*'... half overheard scraps of conversation which, put together, add up the revelations of great truths.'* (Animal's People 117)

The words *film* and *picture* in the example; *why can't we just*

*go and see the film...he had seen the picture of Ruth Lawrence* (Gifted 179) may refer to the same semantic field, but these are merely partially synonymous in the same context, because the former word is more informal than the latter. Similarly, *whore* and *prostitute* in the examples below may refer to the same semantic field, but the former has a more negative charge.

*Whore, have you forgotten the money you owe?* (Animal's People 85).

*Claim to love Nisha yet spy on her and go to bed with a prostitute.* (Animal's People 245).

## 2. Antonymy

Another way of putting the argument is to say that words, or more particularly, the senses of words which define themselves against each other are antonymous. They do so, however, not only by being similar to each other, but also by being different. We can see this if we consider the reverse side of the coin from synonymy, namely, antonymy. Like synonymy, antonymy is also a natural feature of language, and just as it is rare to find two words which are completely identical in meaning, it is similarly rare to find two which are exactly opposite. It is oppositeness of meaning. A basic distinction opposes binary gradable, binary non-gradable, and multiple antonyms. Within each of these classes, further types may be distinguished.

*After a time, which may have been long or short...* (Animal's People 34)

*...a roar is in my head from above and below voices are calling hell...* (Animal's People 334)

*There is dankness now in the castle of lights.* (Animal's People 17)

Gradable antonyms of the type *long / short* consist of endpoints on a gradable scale; there are intermediate positions which may be lexicalized or which may be expressed by modifiers such as *somewhat* or *very*. Three subclasses of gradable antonyms may be distinguished. In the first place, polar antonyms exhibit both symmetrical entailment and markedness. The symmetrical entailment means that the affirmation of one of the antonyms entails the negation of the other: *long* implies *not short*, and *short* implies *not long*. The markedness criterion means that one of the terms may be used as a neutral one which is not committed to one of the poles on the scale: the question *How long is the time?* may receive the answer *short*. One of the terms in the antonymous pair is thus treated as co-hyponymous. In the second place, committed antonyms are characterized by symmetrical entailment, but not by markedness: in the pair *ferocious/meek*, neither of the terms functions as a superordinate. In the third place, asymmetrical antonyms like *good/bad*, *clever/stupid*, *healthy/ill* are ones in which there is an unmarked term, but which express an evaluative meaning that appears to restrict the symmetry. In polar antonymy, one can say both *Ram is shorter than Shyam, but both are tall*, and *Ram is taller than Shyam, but both are short*. In the case of asymmetrical antonyms, the first of these possibilities is blocked: *\*Ram is worse than Shyam, but both are good* versus *Ram is better than Shyam, but both are bad*.

'Non-gradable' antonyms involve pairs like *dead/alive*, which do not define end points on a gradable scale.

*So my second wish is that you go to my first wish and make the impossible possible.* (Animal's People 228)

*...which no one in khaufpur wants to remember, but nobody can forget.* (Animal's People 01)

*Their sounds fly shrieking up and down the empty pipes. (Animal's People 01)*

*Rumi moved her legs back and forth. (Gifted 6)*

*I'm going back to where I came from. (Gifted 24)*

There is another type where both the lexemes are positive and yet opposites: in the following quotes there is set of pairs, mum-dad, brother- sister, uncles-aunties are opposites, yet positive. These are examples of equipollent oppositions <sup>[4]</sup>.

*My friend Faqri, he lost his mum and dad and five brothers and sisters in those lanes. (Animal's People 31)*

*'They are presents, as you well know, for your uncles and aunties and your little brothers and sisters, children. (Gifted 27)*

### 3. Polysemy

Words are capable of signifying more than one sense, both conceptually and associatively. Because of this they can belong to more than one semantic field. In the following quote the word 'mad', for example, having the sense 'insane', can also signify 'angry'. So in addition to belonging to semantic field of madness, it is also a member of the field of anger. This capacity of words to bear more than one sense is referred to as polysemy. A polysemous lexeme has several (apparently) related meanings <sup>[5]</sup>.

*In my mad times when the voice were shouting inside my head I'd be filled with rage against all things that go or even stand on two legs. (Animal's People 2)*

*At noon I'd head to Nisha's. (Animal's People 23)*

Again, in the above quote the word 'head' for example, having the sense 'the upper part of human body or something', can also signify 'move'. So in addition to belonging to semantic field of 'upper part', it is also a member of the field of 'move'.

*Lately Mahesh had agreed that she should try for promotion and Shreene had started wearing the full works to the office: (Gifted 48)*

In the above quote the word 'wear' for example, having the sense 'have on one's body as clothing, decoration, protection', can also signify 'accept'. So in addition to belonging to semantic field of 'clothe', it is also a member of the field of 'accept'.

### 4. Hyponymy

This relation is important for describing nouns, but it also figures in the description of verbs and, to a lesser extent, adjectives. It is concerned with the labelling of sub-categories of a word's denotation. The terms 'hyponymy' and 'hypernymy' both refer to the relationship of semantic inclusion that holds between a more general term such as *cold drink* and a more specific one such as *Miranda, Thumbs Up, Gold Spot, and Limca* as in the example below. Words that are hyponyms on the same level of the same hypernym are 'co-hyponyms'. Thus, for instance, *Miranda, Thumbs Up, Gold Spot, and Limca*, are co-hyponyms of *cold drink* or *might be you drink cold drinks – Miranda, Thumbs Up, Gold Spot, Limca... For baby perhaps she is preferring this? (Gifted 34)*

Here the words *Miranda, Thumbs Up, Gold Spot, and Limca* are members of the field *cold drink*; their sense overlaps with the *cold drink*. The words *Miranda, Thumbs Up, Gold Spot, and Limca* are not really synonyms for *cold drink*, but subordinate types included with in the term *cold drink*. In other words, *cold drink* is a general category which has within it a subset of more specific terms.

*You'll talk of rights, law, justice (Animal's People 03)*

Here the words 'rights' and 'law' are members of the field justice; their sense overlaps with the justice. The words 'rights' and 'law' are not really synonyms for justice, but subordinate types included with in the term 'justice'. In other words, Justice is a general category which has within it a subset of more specific terms.

### 5. Incompatibility

One consequence of hyponymy is that many fields exhibit what is known as incompatibility. Broadly speaking, we can say that words which are mutually exclusive members of the same field exhibit incompatibility <sup>[6]</sup>.

*Some are in Hindi, others in Arabic and Persian, but which ever languages they are in you catch the same meaning. (Animal's People 215)*

In the above quote the field of language is one in which the hyponyms i.e. Hindi, Arabic and Persian exhibit incompatibility very strongly.

*...parts of world such as Congo, Vietnam, Brazil, Plus Tuamotu which, says Pere Bernard, is an island in the Pacific where the order has a leper colony. (Animal's People 143)*

*...this book had pictures in of all the animals of India, bears and apes, wolves, deer of all kinds, rhino, tiger, lion, buffalo, you name it. (Animal's People 223)*

Let's look briefly at the field of 'animals'. This includes such terms as 'bears, apes, wolves, deer rhino, tiger, lion, buffalo and so on. All of these occupy their own semantic space. To begin with, they all have their own satellite of synonymous terms. In addition, they have their own clearly defined boundaries. Indeed, the meaning of buffalo is not that of *rhino, tiger, lion*, and so on. As with antonymy the senses are defined against one another, although not with the same sharpness of opposition; being a 'buffalo' is not the opposite of being a 'lion'

The semantic relation called incompatibility holds between the hyponyms of a given superordinate. Hyponymy is about classification: *Miranda, Thumbs Up, Gold Spot, and Limca* are kinds of *cold drink*. Incompatibility is about contrast: *bears, apes, wolves, deer, rhino, tiger, lion, buffalo* are different from one another within the category of animal. They have their different semantic value.

*And also, by the way, my mum and dad say that British people stole all these stones from people in India, the rubies and diamonds in the precious buildings, before they stopped ruling it. (Gifted 24)*

### 6. Homonymy

*Be patient with us, Elli, says Somraj. One day the patients will come. (Animal's People 223)*

Here, we need to distinguish the words which are identical in sound and shape but different in semantics, for example, in the above quote 'patient' (able to wait without anxious) and 'patient' (a person receiving medical treatment). The fact is that these lexemes look and sound the same is a matter of coincidence; they are accidental look a likes rather than twins. The term which describes this linguistic coincidence is homonymy.

### 7. Meronymy

*It is the relation between the lexical units where the objects, etc. denoted by one are parts of those denoted by other <sup>[7]</sup>. Dirk Geeraerts calls it *Taxonomical, Hyponymous Relation*. It is to be distinguished from a partwhole relation or 'meronymy' <sup>[8]</sup>.*

Meronymy holds between pairs such as *arm* and *finger*: *finger* is a part of *arm* as in the example below. Meronymy can be identified in terms of the predicates 'has' and 'is a part of' (an arm has fingers, and a finger is a part of the arm).

*She could feel a thrilling tingle exploring her arms to her fingers since she had said 'cinema', (Gifted 50)*

*'Four parts of me are strong, head, arms, chest...'* (*Animal's People* 139).

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