

# LING2006 Semantics

## Tutorial: Lexical meaning III

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Based on tutorial handouts by Dr. Zhuo Chen

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## Definition

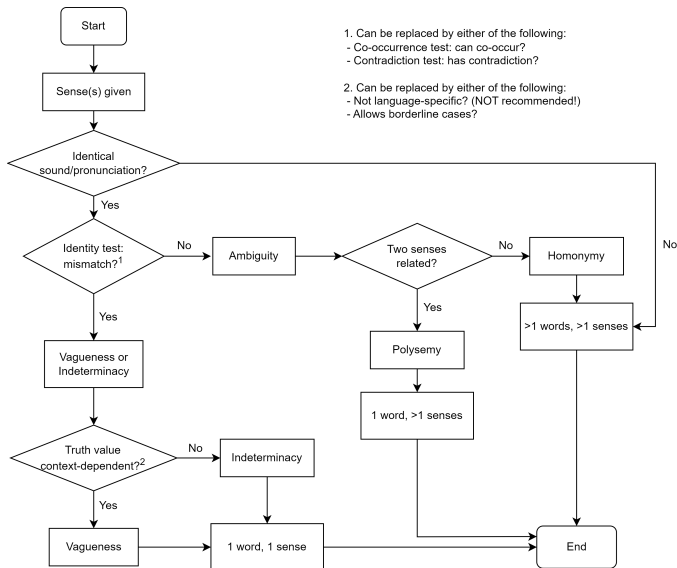
- **Ambiguous** words have **more than one sense** (e.g., *bank*<sub>1</sub> vs. *bank*<sub>2</sub>);
  - Polysemy: 1 word, >1 senses
  - Homonymy: >1 words, >1 senses
- **Vague** and **indeterminate words** have **only one sense**, which might be either vague (e.g., *tall*, *expensive*, *strong*) or indeterminate w.r.t. certain aspects of the sense (e.g., *kick*, *aunt*).
  - 1 word, 1 sense



- In cases of polysemy, the two senses are felt to be **related** in some way; there is an intelligible connection of some sort between senses of a polysemous word.
- In cases of homonymy, the two senses are **unrelated**; that is, the semantic relationship between the two senses of the two homonymous words is similar to that between any two words selected at random.
- Therefore, two senses of a polysemous word generally share at least one salient feature or component of meaning, whereas this is not in general true for homonyms.



- ① a. *bright*<sub>1</sub>: radiating or reflecting light, sunny  
b. *bright*<sub>2</sub>: clever, intelligent
- ② a. After one week's rain, tomorrow's weather finally will turn **bright**!  
b. I'm not sure whether our driver is a **bright** guy.
  - Multiple senses of a word (A. can **B. cannot**) co-occur simultaneously in this word within a sentence; i.e., ambiguity may disappear in a given context.
- ③ a. John drinks **expensive** coffee but drives a **cheap** car.  
b. John's **sisters** are travelling in India now.
  - Vagueness and indeterminacy (A. do **B. do not**) disappear in a word within a sentence.





- It is claimed that the meaning of *cook* is indeterminate instead of being ambiguous or vague.
- Since it is indeterminate, this is NOT a case of polysemy.



- Are all words indeterminate to some extent?
- Short answer: somehow, but for the purpose of this course don't overthink this issue.



Please select all answers that apply

- Regarding polysemous words and homonymous words,
  - Ⓐ They are both considered ambiguous words as they both must involve a case where one linguistic unit with the same form but associated with multiple senses.
  - Ⓑ The senses of a pair of homonymous words are figuratively related.
  - Ⓒ Just like polysemous words, there are also cases of regular/systematic homonymy.
  - Ⓓ For a polysemous word, a figurative sense is usually dependent on its primary sense.





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Please select all answers that apply

- The reason why “perfect” synonymy is rare is because
  - Ⓐ They may belong to different dialects.
  - Ⓑ They may belong to different registers.
  - Ⓒ They may have collocational differences.
  - Ⓓ They may change the meaning of a sentence if you switch one word with its synonymous counterpart.



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Please select all answers that apply

- Regarding contradictory sentences and contrary sentences,
  - ☐ A Contradictory sentences cannot be simultaneously true
  - ☐ B Contrary sentences cannot be simultaneously true
  - ☐ C Contradictory sentences cannot be simultaneously false
  - ☐ D Contrary sentences cannot be simultaneously false



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  - ☐ D Contrary sentences cannot be simultaneously false



## Group discussion

- Discuss for each of the following pairs, whether they are polysemous or homonymous or neither
- ❶ a. *board*: a piece of sawed lumber of little thickness and a length greatly exceeding its width  
b. *bored*: filled with or characterized by boredom
- ❷ a. *ring*(n.): a circular band for holding, connecting, hanging, pulling, (e.g., *a key ring*)  
b. *ring*(v.): to place or form a ring around (e.g., *police ringed the building*)
- ❸ a. *ring*(v.): to place or form a ring around (e.g., *police ringed the building*)  
b. *ring*(v.): to sound resonantly or sonorously (e.g., *the phone is ringing*)



## Group discussion

- Discuss for each of the following pairs, whether they are polysemous or homonymous or neither
- a. *board*: a piece of sawed lumber of little thickness and a length greatly exceeding its width  
b. *bored*: filled with or characterized by boredom
- *Board* and *bored* are homonymous (note that linguistics is mostly concerned with the sound forms of linguistic units, rather than their orthography): They share identical pronunciation /bɔrd/. And these two senses are not related in any obvious way.



## Group discussion

- Discuss for each of the following pairs, whether they are polysemous or homonymous or neither
- a. *ring*(n.): a circular band for holding, connecting, hanging, pulling, (e.g., *a key ring*)  
b. *ring*(v.): to place or form a ring around (e.g., *police ringed the building*)
- *Ring*(n.) and *ring*(v.) are most likely polysemous, as the sense of the latter would not have existed without the former. This is an instance of regular/systematic polysemy: the sense of *ring*(v.) is derived from that of *ring*(n.) via morphological derivation (“conversion” or “zero derivation”).





## Group discussion

- Discuss for each of the following pairs, whether they are polysemous or homonymous or neither
- a. *ring*(v.): to place or form a ring around (e.g., *police ringed the building*)  
b. *ring*(v.): to sound resonantly or sonorously (e.g., *the phone is ringing*)
- *Ring*(n.) and *ring*(v.) are homonymous. These two senses are not related in any obvious way.



## Group discussion

- How about this?
- a. record(n.): a written account of sth that is kept so that it can be looked at and used in the future
- b. record(v.): to keep a permanent account of facts or events by writing them down, filming them, storing them in a computer, etc.



## Group discussion

- How about this?
- a. record(n.): a written account of sth that is kept so that it can be looked at and used in the future
- b. record(v.): to keep a permanent account of facts or events by writing them down, filming them, storing them in a computer, etc.
- 2 distinct words with different sounds; not even a case of homonymy
- Remember, linguistics is mostly concerned with the sound forms of linguistic units, rather than their orthography



## Type 1: Complementary antonyms (simple antonyms)

- The defining property of simple antonyms is that replacing one member of the pair with the other produces sentences which are **contradictory**
- Contradictory sentences cannot be simultaneously true or false in every circumstance
- Note that for the negation of a true sentence is a false one, and the negation of a false sentence is a true one

$P$	$\neg P$
T	F
F	T



## Type 1: Complementary antonyms (simple antonyms)

- The defining property of simple antonyms is that replacing one member of the pair with the other produces sentences which are **contradictory**
- (John went to take the driving test this morning).
  - a. It turns out that John **passed** the test.
  - b. It turns out that John **failed** the test.
- Contradictory sentences cannot be simultaneously true or false in every circumstance
- a. #It turns out that John **passed** the test and he **failed** it.  
b. #It turns out that John **didn't pass** the test and he **didn't fail** it.



## Type 1: Complementary antonyms (simple antonyms)

- The **negation** of one member of a **contradictory pair** entails the truth of the other
- a. John went to take the driving test this morning. It turns out that he **didn't pass** it.  
= John went to take the driving test this morning. It turns out that he **failed** it.
- b. John went to take the driving test this morning. It turns out that he **didn't fail** it.  
= John went to take the driving test this morning. It turns out that he **passed** it.



## Type 2: Gradable (scalar) antonyms

- A defining property of gradable (or scalar) antonyms is that replacing one member of such a pair with the other produces sentences which are **contrary**
- (John just bought a used car)
  - a. John's car is **fast**.
  - b. John's car is **slow**.
- Contrary sentences cannot both be true, though they may both be false
- a. #John's car is both **fast** and **slow**.
  - b. John's car is **not fast** and it is **not slow** either.



## Type 2: Gradable (scalar) antonyms

- The **negation** of one member of a **contrary pair** does not necessarily entail the truth of the other
- John just bought a used car. It is **not fast**.  
≠ John just bought a used car. It is **slow**.





## Type 3: Converse pairs

- Converse pairs involve words that name an asymmetric relation between two entities.
- The two members of a converse pair express the same basic relation, with the positions of the two arguments reversed.
- a. New Territories lies to the **north** of Hong Kong Island.
- b. Hong Kong Island lies to the **south** of New Territories.



## Type 4: Reverse pairs

- Reverse pairs denote **motion or change** in opposite directions and they differ only in respect of directionality. E.g., *descend & ascend*, *implode & explode*, *inflate & deflate*
- A reverse pair hence involves **two separate motions/actions** which have the opposite directionalities.
- Some pairs allow an interesting use of again: the situation is restored to its original state (restitutive reading).
- e.g. At the store, John inflated the airbed before paying for it. And He deflated it **again** to put it in the trunk of his car.



Group discussion: Use one diagnostic to determine which type of antonymy each pair belongs to

- own & belong to
- raise & lower
- dirty & clean
- mortal & immortal



Group discussion: Use one diagnostic to determine which type of antonymy each pair belongs to

- own & belong to
- *As in John owns that house vs. That house belongs to John, switching the positions of John and that house while replacing own with belong to will result in a pair of synonymous sentences.*



Group discussion: Use one diagnostic to determine which type of antonymy each pair belongs to

- raise & lower
- In *John raised the curtain and lowered it again*, a restitutive reading of *again* is possible: It is not necessarily the case that John repeated the action of lowering (the repetitive reading of *again*). Instead, it means that the curtain is restored to its status before being raised.



Group discussion: Use one diagnostic to determine which type of antonymy each pair belongs to

- dirty & clean
- As in *I haven't washed my car for a week, and it is not clean, but it is not dirty either. So I don't want to wash it yet*, replacing *clean* with *dirty* produces sentences that are contrary: *It is clean and it is dirty* is infelicitous, but *it is not clean, but it is not dirty* is felicitous.



Group discussion: Use one diagnostic to determine which type of antonymy each pair belongs to

- mortal & immortal
- Both *Human species are mortal and immortal* and *Human species are not mortal and not immortal either* are infelicitous, showing that replacing *mortal* with *immortal* produces sentences that are contradictory



- **HW1 has been posted, due 11:59pm, Sat, Feb 24**
- Please scan the QR code and complete the attendance form