

March 12, 2010

CLASS 16: MEANING, MENTAL, MIND

WHERE AND WHAT IS SEMANTICS, WHERE AND WHAT IS IT NOT, AND WHY?

The “pairing of sound and meaning” is typically captured in a ‘syntactocentric’ model.

(1) syntax/morphology (=syntax) feeds LF and PF → C/I and S/M

- truth be told, we don’t care too much about “lexical semantics”: fuzzy, vague
- oddly enough, however, we do care about the meanings of functional words
- take the meaning of *green*; other examples: *London, book, France, Twin Earth*
- *paint the house blue* (outside) vs. *paint the cave blue* (inside)
- no subject resultatives: *rode the horse tired, hammer the metal flat, drank the river dry*

(2) a. I almost had my book stolen.
b. I almost had Bill arrested.
c. I almost had the game won.

- context and experience determine salient reading (leave this stuff to the philosophers)

So, what is semantics?

- *Ann smokes* is true iff Ann smokes

(3) a. John kicked a ball.
b. LxLy kick’ (y,x) <e, <e, t>> at time I, i < i’
c. Exists(e) & Asserted-as-true(e) & Agent(John, e) & Patient(ball, e) & kick(e) & past(e)

- actually, our bet that syntax–semantics mapping is simple is interesting / controversial
- and we think this mapping is unique to humans (more on this after the Easter break)
- next, let’s talk about some “negative facts”)concerning *structure*, not *content*)

(4) The CEO called the secretary from Boston. (*CEO is from Boston)

(5) a. John broke the vase at midnight.
b. The vase broke (at midnight).
b. #Someone broke the vase.

(6) a. The clown laughed. → *The clown laughed the child.
b. John sneezed. → *The pepper sneezed John.

(can’t happen to denominal verbs — *do a laugh, do a sneeze*)

