Tikrit University

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Linguistics- 4th year-

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SEMANTIC FEATURES

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We can make this observation more generally applicable by trying to determine the crucial element or feature of meaning that any noun must have in order to be used as the subject of the verb ate. Such an element may be as general as "animate being." We can then use this idea to describe part of the meaning of words as having either plus (þ) or minus (−) that particular feature. So, the feature that the noun boy has is "−animate" (¼ denotes an animate being) and the feature that the noun hamburger has is "−animate" (¼ does not denote an animate being). This simple example is an illustration of a procedure for analyzing meaning in terms of semantic features. Features such as "þanimate / −animate," "þhuman / −human," "þfemale / −female," for example, can be treated as the basic elements involved in differentiating the meaning of each word in a language from every other word. If we had to provide the crucial distinguishing features of the meanings of a set of English words such as table, horse, boy, man, girl, woman, we could begin with the chart in Table 9.1. From a feature analysis like this, we can say that at least part of the meaning of the word girl in English involves the elements [þhuman, þfemale, −adult]. We can also characterize the feature that is crucially required in a noun in order for it to appear as the subject of a particular verb, supplementing the syntactic analysis with semantic features. We can then predict which nouns (e.g. table, horse, hamburger) would make the sentence semantically odd.

The _____ is reading the newspaper

N [þhuman]

Words as containers of meaning

The approach just outlined is a start on analyzing the conceptual components of word meaning, but it is not without problems. For many words in a language it may not be as easy to come up with neat components of meaning. If we try to think of the components or features we would use to differentiate the nouns advice, threat and warning, for example, we may not be very successful. Part of the problem seems to be that the approach involves a view of words in a language as some sort of "containers" that carry meaning components. There is clearly more to the meaning of words than these basic types of features.

The semantic features of a word can be notated using a binary feature notation common to the framework of componential analysis.[11] A semantic property is specified in square brackets and a plus or minus sign indicates the existence or non-existence of that property.[12]

- *cat* is
    - [+animate],
    - [+domesticated],
    - [+feline]
- *puma* is
    - [+animate],
    - [−domesticated],
    - [+feline]
- *dog* is
    - [+animate],
    - [+domesticated],

- [−feline]

- *wolf* is

  - [+animate],

  - [−domesticated]

  - [−feline]

  Intersecting [semantic classes](#) share the same features. Some features need not be specifically mentioned as their presence or absence is obvious from another feature. This is a [redundancy](#) rule.

Theoretical context

The analysis of semantic features is utilized in the field of linguistic semantics, more specifically the subfields of [lexical semantics](#),[4] and [lexicology](#). One aim of these subfields is to explain the meaning of a word in terms of their relationships with other words In order to accomplish this aim, one approach is to analyze the internal semantic structure of a word as composed of a number of distinct and minimal components of meaning. This approach is called [componential analysis](#), also known as semantic decomposition.\ Semantic decomposition allows any given lexical item to be defined based on minimal elements of meaning, which are called semantic features. The term *semantic feature* is usually used interchangeably with the term *semantic component*. Additionally, semantic features/semantic components are also often referred to as [semantic properties](#).

The theory of componential analysis and semantic features is not the only approach to analyzing the semantic structure of words. An alternative direction of research that contrasts with componential analysis is [prototype semantics](#).