

Features of representational meaning



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While some, more or less radical, *distinction* between language and linguistic behaviour (between language and speech, language and communication, sentence and utterance) is universally assumed, the nature of the *relation* between them is less often addressed or characterised in a manner satisfactory in itself or consistent with the distinctions we wish to make. The more radical the distinction, the more urgent the question of their relation becomes. The paper sketches some of the problems and outlines a proposal. This takes the form of a Representational Hypothesis about the relation, designed to be consistent with (and render defensible) a very radical distinction between language and such behaviour. The discussion focuses on ambiguity both for itself and for illustrative purposes. It is suggested that ambiguity is not a linguistically semantic phenomenon and indeed not linguistic.

1. Rationale

In the process of learning English, I have profoundly realized that English semantics is rather abstract with a large scope including word meaning, sentence meaning, utterance meaning. Each type of meaning includes many different parts. For examples, sentence meaning has grammaticality, acceptability and meaningfulness, the principle of compositionality, variables in the function of sentence meaning, the representational meaning, the interpersonal meaning. It is rather complex and not used regularly in the fact. However, It is an essential part in syllabus for English major students. It provides the major knowledge of English language for the learners and help them deeply understand its characteristics and know the way to use it better and better, so they need to study it well but in fact, it is not easy at all. The

learners have difficulties when using it. They spend much time on learning it, but the understanding of its characteristics is limited. For the reason, a study on representational meaning – one of basic part of English semantics has been chosen as the title of my assignment paper.

2. Aims of the study on the representational meaning

Generally speaking, the representational meaning is abstract part in English semantics. It is not close to the fact. Therefore, the majority of learners have difficulties when using it. They make mistakes when distinguishing between types of the representational meaning. Therefore, this assignment paper focuses on the representational meaning with its scopes and characteristics to help learners well distinguish its types and use it flexibly and exactly in studying.

3. Scope of the study

Semantics is large category in English language with its scopes such as word meaning, sentence meaning utterance meaning. However, due to my limited knowledge, the writer only concentrate on the study on the representational meaning. It is particularized at the 3 main kinds of the representational meaning including processes, participants and circumstances with their definitions and characteristics.

4. The method of the study

With the desire of making English representational meaning clear and specific, my methods of the study are data collection from having discussion with supervisors, friends, reading materials (text books, reference...) and collecting typical examples.

5. Design of the study

This study provides a clear organization consisting of three main parts that help an easy exploration and practical benefits gained for readers as well: Chapter one is the introduction including rationale, scope of the study, aims of the study, the method and design of the study; Chapter two is entitled development and divided into three parts: Part I is the theoretical background, Part II is the representational meaning including definitions and characteristics of its types and Part III is implication including the difficulties of the learners when using it and suggested solution; Chapter three is conclusion, summarizing what have been discussed in the previous.

1. Theoretical Background

1. 1. Semantics

1. 1. 1. Definition of semantics

There are many authors who define semantics. Some of the most typical definitions listed as follows:

Semantics is the systematic study of meaning in language. In other word, it is the study of how language organizes and expresses meaning.

(Nguyen Hoa, 2004)

Semantics deals with the literal meaning of words and the meaning of the way they are combined, which taken together form the core of meaning or the starting point from – which the whole meaning of a particular utterance is constructed.

(Lyons (1995: Xii))

1. 1. 2. The approaches of semantics

There are 3 main approaches of semantics including lexical semantics, formal semantics and cognitive semantics.

1. 1. 2. 1. Lexical semantics

Lexical semantics is a field which deals mainly with word meaning and relations between them. It covers various theories of the word structure, the differences and similarities in lexical semantic structure between different languages and relationship of word meaning to sentence meaning and syntax.

1. 1. 2. 2. Formal semantics

Formal semantics is called formal since it attempt to adapt analytical techniques from formal logic to the study of meaning. It is concerned with relation between expressions especially sentences which express propositions. The basic tenet of formal semantics is that it considers proposition as the meaning of the sentence, which is identified with the set of possible words and it is concerned with its truth condition. The main focus of formal semantics is on truth conditions, entailment, reference, denotation, contradiction model, inference, quantification.

1. 1. 2. 3. Cognitive semantics:

Cognitive semantics is seen as mapping from linguistic expression to cognitive structures and language is seen as part of the cognitive structure.

The main tenets of the cognitive semantics can be summarised as follows:

a) Meaning is conceptualisation in the cognitive model. More precisely, it involves the mapping from the expression of the language to some mental entities and does not concern itself with such important concepts of formal semantics as reference and truth.

1. Cognitive models are mainly perceptually determined as it happens cognitive structures are connected to our perceptual mechanisms either directly or indirectly. Thus, meaning are more or less perceptually grounded.
2. Semantic elements are based on the spatial or topological objects. Mental structures applied in cognitive semantics are the meaning of linguistic expression.
3. Cognitive models are primarily image – schematic.
4. Semantics is primary to syntax and partly determines it .
5. Concepts show prototype effect

Cognitive semantics is concerned with important notions as perspective, imagery construal, figure ground organization, abstraction, conceptual metaphor.

1. 1. 3. Semantics properties

Accepting the fact that the meaning of an expression can be viewed as combination of features, we can decompose the meaning of a word into what we call semantic features or properties. Consider the word “ mandate ” in the following example :

E. g.:" I think I have a mandate to make the government work again".

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Our adequate knowledge of the word "mandate" tell us that "mandate" is an authority given to "somebody" or "organization" by people who support. We will know that it is not like word "responsibility" which just means a "duty", it is given to "sombody" or "organization" not an "animal" and especially by whose support it. Such features are called semantic features. They can used to define the meanings of a word. And the method involing the use of these properties is called "componential method"

One and the same semantic feature may be part of the meaning of many different words. Female is a semantic property that helps to define:

			maide
bich hen	actress		n

		debutan	
doe more		widow	
	te		

	vixe		woma
ewe	girl		n
	n		

We should also notice that the last word "girl, woman" are characterized by another property "human". The following table shows how the componential method is employed to decompose the meaning of a number of word

Propert	actre		bachel	mar
y	ss	baby Girl	or	e

human	+	+	+	+	+
female	+	+	-	+
young	...	+	+	-	-

(Fromkin et al, 1984: 167)

There are many more properties which define the meaning of the word. Some scholars believe that it is possible to the limited number of these semantic properties that could be employed to define the meaning of the lexicon of any language. However, there is much disagreement as to what constitutes a semantic property. There are difficulties involved. For example, the word "baby" can not be defined either as "male" or "female" since a baby can be either sex.

1. 1. 4. Scopes of semantics

1. 1. 4. 1. Word meaning

1. 1. 4. 1. 1. Form and Expression

Words are also considered expressions. Words and word forms are distinguished from each other in terms of distinction between lexical meaning and grammatical meaning.

E. g.: cook – cooks, cooking, cooked .

Different forms of the word will share the same lexical meaning but different grammatical meaning .

E. g.: Lovely, lovelier, loveliest.

Different words may share grammatical meaning but different lexical meaning .

E. g.: love, hate, eat, drink.

1. 1. 4. 1. 2. Lexical and grammatical meaning revisited

The lexical meaning of the word really means the individual and reflective meaning of a word.

The grammatical meaning can be defined as relationships between words based on contrastive features of arrangements in which they occur.

1. 1. 4. 1. 3. Components of word – meaning

There are 4 major components of word -meaning:

a) Denotation which includes: conceptual and referential meanings;

Denotation exists by virtue of what it refers to.

b) Connotation including stylistic, affective, evaluative and intensifying is the pragmatic communicative value the words acquires by virtue of where, when, how and by whom, for what purpose and in what context it is or may be used.

c) Structural meaning, which is the meaning a word acquires by virtue of its membership in a system or a set. It includes reflected meaning, collative meaning, associative meaning and themantic meaning.

d) Categorical meaning is one part of grammatical meaning which words derive from being a member of one category rather than another (nouns rather verbs and so on). Words fall in to such categories as Noun, verbs, Adjectives, Prepositions, conjunction.

1. 1. 4. 1. 4. Semantic field (lexical field)

1. 1. 4. 1. 4. 1. Definition of semantic field

A lexical / semantic field is the organization of related words and expressions into a system which shows their relationships to one another. The value of a word is determined by defining it in relation to the value of neighbouring or contrasting words. Thus, the vocabulary of a language is viewed as an integrated system of lexemes interrelated in sense.

A semantic field is a set of interrelated senses based on a conceptual field or spectrum.

E. g.: In terms of colour : 4 primary color terms: Blue, green, yellow, red.

Environment : overfish, overexploit, pollute, contaminate, ozone depletion, rain forests.

Beach : towel, umbrella, lotion, bikini, sand. Carpenter: lumber, nails, drills, saw, chisel. Dentist: filling, cavity, extract, pull.

Degree of redness : red, Scarlet, orange, Crimson, rose.

(Arnold (1986) i. v)

1. 1. 4. 1. 4. 2. Ways of grouping words

- Thematically

Words of the same part of speech that cover the same conceptual field. E. g.:
cooking: boil, bake, fry, broil, steam.

- Ideographically

Words of different parts of speech but thematically related.

E. g.: Holiday: to book (a flight), a package tour, hotel, luxurious, etc .

1. 1. 4. 2. Sentence meaning**1. 1. 4. 2. 1 – Definition of sentence meaning**

A sentence is a large unit of grammatical organization within which parts of speech (noun, verb, adjective ...) and grammatical classes (word, phrase, clause) are said to function. In English, a sentence normally contains one independent clause.

The meaning of a sentence is not the sum of the meaning of the word used in the sentence. It is what a sentence means regardless of context and situation in which it may be used .

It is more correct to regard it as function of the meaning of the word used in the sentence, modality and structural meaning signaled by the way words are organized into sentence.

1. 1. 4. 2. 2. Proposition**1. 1. 4. 2. 2. 1. Definition of proposition**

A proposition is that part of the meaning of the utterance of a declarative sentence which describes some states of affairs.

A proposition is defined as the invariant meaning expressed by a sentence, devoid of any modality.

E. g.: She is probably right.

Proposition: she is right . Modality: Probable – impossible

In semantics, the letters “ p, q, r” are often used as symbols of propositions.

Proposition involves in the meanings of not only declarative, but also interrogative and imperative sentence.

E. g.: Is she right ?

Be careful.

The state of the affairs typically involves person or things referred to the expression in the sentence. In uttering a declarative sentence, a speaker typically asserts a proposition.

1. 1. 4. 2. 2. 2. Proposition content

A proposition usually consists of:

- (a) something which is named or talked about known as argument or entity,
- (b) an assertion or prediction made about the argument.

E. g.: The man bit the dog. The dog bit the man.

Predicate : Bite

Two argument : Man, Dog

The meaning of a sentence consists of the predicate, argument (s) and role of each argument. Arguments refer to entities while predicates deal with events, properties, attributes and states. Those individuals that are independent and can stand alone are arguments. Things like qualities, relations, actions and processes that are dependent and can not stand alone are termed predicates .

E. g.: My computer

Break down, fast, new.

1. 1. 4. 2. 2. 3. Common types of semantic roles

Semantic role Examples

Agent /does She opened the door

Affected Marry kicked the dog

Effected She took deep breath

Locative We reached London
by mid night

Instrument / The key open the

Means	door
Recipient	She gave <u>me</u> two books
Goal	He kicked <u>the dog</u>
Experiencer	<u>I</u> like the play.
Carrier	<u>She</u> is happy.
Identified	<u>Bill Gate</u> is the president
Identifier	Bill Gate is <u>the president</u>

1. 1. 4. 3. Utterance

1. 1. 4. 3. 1. Definition of utterance

Utterance meaning is what a speaker means when he makes an utterance in a certain situation.

Utterances consist of performative and constative ones.

1. 1. 4. 3. 2. Types of utterances

1. 1. 4. 3. 2. 1. Performative utterance:

A performative utterance is one that actually describes the act that it performs. It performs some acts and simultaneously describes that act.

E. g.: I promise to pay you tomorrow.

A typical performative utterance usually contains the first person pronoun E. g.: I promise; I congratulate.....

These are all verbs describing speech acts. We classify them and performative verbs.

1. 1. 4. 3. 2. 2. Constative utterances

A constative utterance is one which makes an assertion. It is often the utterance of a declarative sentence, but is not performative.

Eg: I am trying to get this box with screwdriver.

It is a constative utterance because because it makes an assertion about a particular state of affair but not performative. The utterance does not simultaneously describe and perform the same act.

2. The representational Meaning

2. 1. The representational meaning

The representational meaning is rather abstract in English semantics.

Therefore the learners need to pay much attention to its general characteristics as follows to approach and study it easily.

According to Halliday, the experiential subcomponent of the representational meaning provides an account of the underlying content of a sentence or an utterance. It handles within its scopes:

1. Processes: actions, events, states, relations.
2. Participating entities (participants): persons, objects, abstractions.

3. Circumstances: time, places, reasons, conditions, results... which are associated with the process.

We all know that the nominal group represents the various types of participants. The verbal groups denote the process. And other types of units like the prepositional phrases or adverbial clauses realize the circumstance component.

E. g.: She kicked the dog out of the house.

The participants realized by NPs: she and the dog

The process realized by the verb: kicked

The circumstance realized by the PP : out of the house.

The relationships between processes, participants, and their circumstance are expressed through what Halliday terms transitivity network. Transitivity really means "going through" or "extending to another entity".

On the dimension of transitivity, clauses may be organized into two types :

The transitive and the ergative sentences to accommodate better the situation regarding the actual occurrence of sentence patterns.

In transitive sentence, the most prominent roles are actor, goal, if the process is one of the action

E. g.: I bought my wife a cake.

Or they are "attributor" and "attributant". If the process is one of ascription (attribution)

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E. g.: Bill Gates is the richest man in the world.

In the ergative type, the central roles are the “causer” of the process and the

“affected” the participant affected by the process.

E. g.: Everyone likes the play.

It is possible to rephrase it into “the play pleases everyone” or “the play causes him to like itself”.

Those sentences involving action process as defined above are called extensive, and those concerned with ascription (attribution) as termed intensive. Halliday also introduces another basic distinction between effective and descriptive extensive transitive sentences.

(a) Effective sentences

The action is goal directed or targeted at another object called goal. This means that the sentence has to involve at least two participants.

E. g.: I bought a car.

Some sentences may have three participants.

E. g.: I gave her a flower.

(b) Descriptive sentences

It involves non-directed action since the sentence is associated with just one participant.

E. g.: The recruits marched. Actor – the recruits, Process – marched .

Halliday speaks of another type called “ nuclear”.

(c) Nuclear sentences

It is the one associated with the either one or two participants.

E. g.: Mary open the door. The door opened.

The door was opened (by Mary).

However there exists a possibility of transforming “ The recruits marched ” into “ the sergeant marched the recruits”. To account for this sentence,

Halliday uses another role, which is that of initiator, discretely from the actor role. Thus, we have:

Initiator – the sergeant

process – marched Actor – recruits

And the logical subcomponent handles logical relations between various types of elements of sentence and such relation as subordination and apposition.

2. 2. Functions of the representational meaning

The representational meaning can be defined in terms of experiential and logical functions.

2. 2. 1. The experiential function is to communicate ideas

It is the main function by which a speaker expresses the content elements of his utterance, by referring to people, objects, states of affairs, events, qualities, places, actions and circumstances, all of which are parts of the world we live in.

E. g.: Bill Gates gave me books to read after each session.

2. 2. 2. The logical function relates ideas to each other on an equal or

subordinate basis:

E. g.: I came, I saw and I conquered. (equal)

The rise in Microsoft stock in 1996 meant that he made on paper about \$30 million a day. (subordinate)

2. 3. Scopes of representational meaning

2. 3. 1. The process

Process is a powerful concept which represents the possible world as consisting of going on: doing, happening, feeling and being.

Halliday (1994: 106-107) states that the processes in a language like English are constructed by the transitivity system. He also makes a distinction between what humans experience as going on “ out there”, in the world around us and what we experience as going inside ourself. Thus the main type of the process that expresses out outer experience is called “ material” process as opposed against the “ mental” one that expresses our inner experience. But there is a third important element to be added. We learn to

generalize to relate or connect our experience. This process is termed "relational".

According to Halliday, the boundaries of the three main types of process are further ones not clearly set apart, but nevertheless recognizable as intermediate between the different pairs. Thus, between material and mental processes, we find behavioural process: those that represent outer manifestation of our inner working, the acting out of processes of consciousness and physiological states. The borderline of mental and relational processes are verbal processes that represent symbolic relationship constructed in human consciousness and enacted in the form of the language. The last one is the existential processes between the material and relational which are concerned with existence

[Halliday, 1994: 107]

2.3.1.1. Types of processes:

2.3.1.1.1. Material processes: processes of doing
2.3.1.1.1.1. Definition of material processes:

Material processes are those that express our outer experiences.

2.3.1.1.1.2. Characteristics of material processes:

The material processes usually involve one or two entities :

An actor + a goal

If there is one entity, it is the actor

E. g.: The lion sprang.

Jack fell down.

If there are two entities, they are the actor and goal.

In this case: The actor can do something to the goal.

E. g.: She hit the ball.

The lion caught the tourist.

The actor can create or bring about the goal.

E. g.: He has built a fortune along away.

Material processes are processes of “doing”. They express the notion that some entity “does” something which may be done “to” some other entity.

So we can ask about or “probe” material processes by using the verb “do”

E. g.: what did the lion do?.

What did the lion do to the tourist?.

If there is goal of the process, as well as an Actor, the representation may come in either of two forms : either active, *the lion caught the tourist* , or passive, *the tourist was caught by the lion*.

1.		2.	by
	the		the
The		The	lion

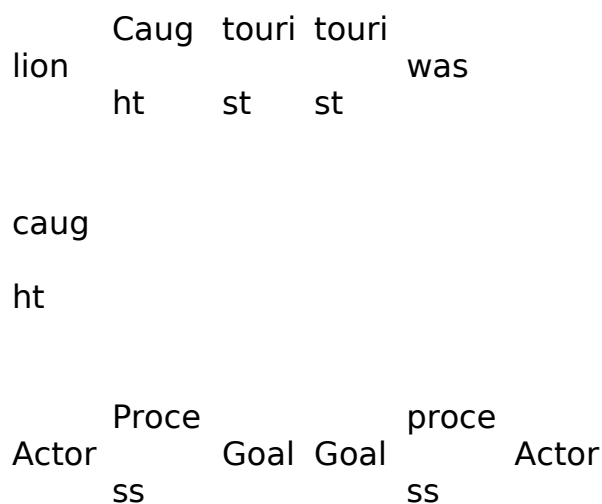


Figure 1: active and passive clauses.

- Material process are not necessarily concrete, physical events; they may be abstract doing and happening

E. g.: The mayor resigned.

ActorProcess

The president dissolved the committee.

Actor processgoal

3. Implication: The Difficulties of Learners When Using Representational and Suggested Solution

3. 1. The difficulties of learners when using representational meaning

Due to the abstract, complex characteristics of the representational meaning, the learners particularly the students of English department have the difficulties in the processing of studying and using it in some following cases:

3. 1. 1. Distinguishing between attributive and identifying:

Intensive type of relational processes is rather complex. It comes into two distinct modes: attributive and identifying with characteristic of each mode. Therefore, the learners have difficulties distinguishing between them.

E. g.: He is a smart boy.

In the above sentence, they misunderstand between two characteristics of attributive and identifying. They particularly consider “ a smart boy” as a characteristic of identifying but in fact, “ a smart boy ” is attributive. It has an indefinite article “ a”, a typical feature of attributive.

In addition, the line between the attributive and identifying modes is less clear in the circumstantial than in the intensive type of relational clause. It is less obvious whether an expression such as on the mat designates a class (that has members – the class of things that are on the mat) or an identity (the thing that is identified by being on the mat.).

3. 1. 2. Distinguishing between types of relational processes in the following cases

The relational processes have complex, large characteristics. The English system of relational processes operates with three main types: intensive, circumstantial, processive. Each of these come in to distinct modes:

Attributive: a is attribute of x

Identifying : a is the identity of x

In circumstantial processes – attributive , circumstance is expressed in the form of the attribute and the form of process. In circumstantial processes –

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identify, the circumstance takes the form of a relationship between two entities. The relationship is expressed either as a feature of the participants or as a feature of the process. In possessive processes – attributive, the possessive relationship may be expressed either as attribute or as process. In possessive processes – identifying, possessive relationship is expressed either as a feature of participants or as a feature of process. With these complex, large characteristics, the learners make mistakes when distinguishing between the types of relational processes.

E. g.: Peter has a piano.

Peter owns the piano.

The learners always make mistakes between 2 two verbs “ has, owns”. They consider them as possessive – attribute. But only the verb “ has” is one of possessive – attributive, the verb “ own” is the case of possessive - identifying. Therefore, they incorrectly identify entities : carrier – attributive, identified – identifier.

3. 1. 3 – Distinguishing between mental and behavioural processes:

Participant of behavioural processes who is behaving, label