Semantics and theories of semantics

Experience, Meaning of Life

Semantics and Theories of Semantics Semantics is the study of meaning in language. We know that language is used to express meanings which can be understood by others. But meanings exist in our minds and we can express what is in our minds through the spoken and written forms of language (as well as through gestures, action etc.). The sound patterns of language are studied at the level of phonology and the organisation of words and sentences is studied at the level of morphology and syntax. These are in turn organised in such a way that we can convey meaningful messages or receive and understand messages. ' How is language organised in order to be meaningful?' This is the question we ask and attempt to answer at the level of semantics. Semantics is that level of linguistic analysis where meaning is analysed. It is the most abstract level of linguistic analysis, since we cannot see or observe meaning as we can observe and record sounds. Meaning is related very closely to the human capacity to think logically and to understand. So when we try to analyse meaning, we are trying to analyse our own capacity to think and understand, our own ability to create meaning. Semantics concerns itself with ' giving a systematic account of the nature of meaning' (Leech). Difficulties in the Study of Meaning The problem of ' meaning' is quite difficult, it is because of its toughness that some linguists went on to the extent of excluding semantics from linguistics. A well-known structuralist made the astonishing statement that ' linguistic system of a languagedoes not include the semantics. The system is abstract, it is a signaling system, and as soon as we study semantics we are no longer studying language but the semantic system associated with language. The structralists were of the opinion that it is only the form of language which

can be studied, and not the abstract functions. Both these are misconceptions. Recently a serious interest has been taken in the various problems of semantics. And semantics is being studied not only by the linguists but also by philosophers, psychologists, scientists, anthropologists and sociologists. Scholars have long puzzled over what words mean or what they represent, or how they are related to reality. They have at times wondered whether words are more real than objects, and they have striven to find the essential meanings of words. It may be interesting to ask whether words do have essential meaning. For example, difficulties may arise in finding out the essential meaning of the word table in water table, dining table, table amendment, and the table of 9. An abstract word like good creates even more problems. Nobody can exactly tell what good really means, and how a speaker of English ever learns to use the word correctly. So the main difficulty is to account facts about essential meanings, multiple meanings, and word conditions. The connotating use of words adds further complications to any theorizations about meaning, particularly their uses in metaphor and poetic language. Above all is the question : where does meaning exist: in the speaker or the listener or in both, or in the context or situation ? Words are in general convenient units to state meaning. But words have meanings by virtue of their employment in sentences, most of which contain more than one word. The meaning of a sentence, though largely dependent on the meaning of its component words taken individually, is also affected by prosodic features. The question whether word may be semantically described or in isolation, is more a matter of degree than of a simple answer yes or no. It is impossible to describe meaning adequately

any other way except by saying how words are typically used as part of longer sentences and how these sentences are used. The meanings of sentences and their components are better dealt with in linguistics in turns of how they function than exclusively in terms of what they refer to. Words are tools; they become important by the function they perform, the job they do, the way they are used in certain sentences. In addition to reference and function, scholars have also attached import talkie to popular historical considerations, especially etymology, while studying word-meanings. Undobtedly the meaning of any word is casually the product of continuous changes in its antecedent meanings or uses, and in many cases it is the collective product of generations of cultural history. Dictionaries often deal with this sort of information if it is available, but in so ding they are passing beyond the bounds of synchronic statement to the separate linguistic realm of historical explanation. Different answers have been given to the questions related to meaning. Psychologists have tried to assess the availability of certain kinds of responses to objects, to experiences, and to words themselves. Philosophers have proposed a variety of systems and theories to account for the data that interest them. Communication scientists have developed information theory so that they can use mathematical models to explain exactly what is predictable and what is not predictable when messages are channeled through various kinds of communication networks. From approaches like these a complex array of conceptions of meaning emerges. Lexical and Grammatical Meaning When we talk about meaning, we are talking about the ability of human beings to understand one another when they speak. This ability is to some extent connected with grammar. No

one could understand: hat one the but red green on bought tried Rameez. while Rameez tried on the red had but bought the green one causes no difficulties. Yet there are numerous sentences which are perfectly grammatical, but meaningless. The most famous example is Chomsky's sentence " Colourless green ideas sleep furiously". Similar other examples are: * The tree ate the elephant. * The pregnant bachelor gave birth to six girls tomorrow. * The table sneezed. In a sentence such as Did you understand the fundamentals of linguistics? A linguist has to take into account at least two different types of meaning: lexical meaning and grammatical meaning. Full words have some kind of intrinsic meaning. They refer to objects, actions and qualities that can be identified in the external world, such as table, banana, sleep, eat, red. Such words are said to have lexical meaning. Empty words have little or no intrinsic meaning. They exist because of their grammatical function in the sentence. For example, and is used to join items, or indicates alternative, of sometimes indicates possession. These words have grammatical meaning. Grammatical meaning refers mainly to the meaning of grammatical items as did, which, ed. Grammatical meaning may also cover notions such as ' subject' and ' object', sentence types as 'interrogative', ' imperative' etc. Because of its complexity, grammatical meaning is extremely difficult to study. As yet, no theory of semantics has been able to handle it portly. But the study of lexical items is more manageable. What is Meaning? Philosophers have puzzled over this question for over 2000 years. Their thinking begins from the question of the relationship between words and the objects which words represent. For example, we may ask: What is the meaning of the word '

cow'? One answer would be that it refers to an animal who has certain properties, that distinguish it from other animals, who are called by other names. Where do these names come from and why does the word ' cow' mean only that particular animal and none other? Some thinkers say that there is no essential connection between the word ' cow' and the animal indicated by the word, but we have established this connection by convention and thus it continues to be so. Others would say that there are some essential attributes of that animal which we perceive in our minds and our concept of that animal is created for which we create a corresponding word. According to this idea, there is an essential correspondence between the sounds of words and their meanings, e. g., the word ' buzz' reproduces ' the sound made by a bee'. It is easy to understand this, but not so easy to understand how ' cow' can mean' a four-legged bovine'–there is nothing in the sound of the word ' cow' to indicate that, (Children often invent words that illustrate the correspondence between sound and meaning: they may call a cow ' moo-moo' because they hear it making that kind of sound.) The above idea that words in a language correspond to or stand for the actual objects in the world is found in Plato's dialogue Cratylus. However, it applies only to some words and not to others, for example, words that do not refer to objects, e. g. ' love', ' hate'. This fact gives rise to the view held by later thinkers, that the meaning of a word is not the object it refers to, but the concept of the object that exists in the mind. Moreover, as de Saussure pointed out, the relation between the word (signifier) and the concept (signified) is an arbitrary one, i. e. the word does not resemble the concept. . Also, when we try to define the meaning of a word we do so by using other

words. So, if We try to explain the meaning of ' table' we need to use other words such as ' four', ' legs', and ' wood' and these words in turn can be explained only by means of other words. In their book, The Meaning of Meaning, L. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards made an attempt to define meaning. When we use the word ' mean', we use it in different ways. ' I mean to do this' is a way of expressing our intention. ' The red signal means stop' is a way of indicating what the red signal signifies. Since all language consists of signs, we can say that every word is a sign indicating something–usually a sign indicates other signs. Ogden and Richards give the following list of some definitions of ' meaning'. Meaning can be any of the following: 1. An intrinsic property of some thing 2. Other words related to that word in a dictionary 3. The connotations of a word (that is discussed below) 4. The thing to which the speaker of that word refers 5. The thing to which the speaker of that word should refer 6. The thing to which the speaker of that word believes himself to be referring 7. The thing to which the hearer of that word believes is being referred to. These definitions refer to many different ways in which meaning is understood. One reason for the range of definitions of meaning is that words (or signs) in a language are of different types. Some signs indicate meaning in a direct manner, e. g. an arrow (¾®) indicates direction. Some signs are representative of the thing indicated, e. g. onomatopoeic wards such as ' buzz'. ' tinkle' ' ring'; even ' cough'. ' slam', ' rustle have onomatopoeic qualities. Some signs do not have any resemblance to the thing they refer to, but as they stand for that thins, they are symbolic. Taking up some of the above definitions of meaning, we can discuss the different aspects of meaning o a word as follows: (i) The logical or denotative

meaning. This is the literal meaning of a word indicating the idea or concept to which it refers. concept is a minimal unit of meaning which could be called a ' sememe' in the same way as the unit of sound is called a ' phoneme' and is like the ' morpheme h Is structure and organisation. Just as the phoneme /b/ may be defined as a bilatial + voiced + plosive, the word ' man' may be defined as a concept consisting of a structure of meaning ' human + male + adult' expressed through the basic morphological unit ' m + Ã¦ + n'. All the three qualities are logical attributes of which the concept ' man' is made. They are the minimal qualities that the concept must possess in order to be a distinguishable concept, e. g. if any of these changes, the concept too changes. So ' human + female + adult' would not be the concept referred to by the word ' man', since it is a different concept. (ii) The connotative meaning. This is the additional meaning that a concept carries. It is defined as ' the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to over and above its purely conceptual content' (Leech, 1981). That is, apart from its logical or essential attributes, there is a further meaning attached to a word, which comes from its reference to other things in the real world. In the real world, such a word may be associated with some other features or attributes. For example, the logical or denotative meaning of the word ' woman' is the concept, ' human + female + adult'. To it may be added the concept of ' weaker sex' or ' frailty'. These were the connotations or values associated with the concept of ' woman'. Thus connotative meaning consists of the attributes associated with a concept. As we know, these associations come into use over a period of time in a particular culture and can change with change in time. While denotative meaning remains

stable since it defines the essential attributes of a concept, connotative meaning changes as it is based on associations made to the concept; these associations may change. (iii) The social meaning: This is the meaning that a word or a phrase conveys about the circumstances of its use. That is, the meaning of a word is understood according to the different style and situation in which the word is used, e. g. though the words ' domicile', ' residence', ' abode', ' home' all refer to the same thing (i. e. their denotative meaning is the same), each word belongs to a particular situation of use–'domicile' is used in an official context, ' residence' in a formal context, ' abode' is a poetic use and ' home' is an ordinary use. Where one is used, the other is not seen as appropriate. Social meaning derives from an awareness of the style in which something is written and spoken and of the relationship between speaker and hearer–whether that relationship is formal, official, casual, polite, or friendly. (iv) The thematic meaning: This is the meaning which is communicated by the way in which a speaker or writer organises the message in terms of ordering, focus and emphasis. It is often felt, for example, that an active sentence has a different meaning from its passive equivalent although its conceptual meaning seems to be the same. In the sentences: Mrs. Smith donated the first prize The first prize was donated by Mrs. Smith the thematic meaning is different. In the first sentence it appears that we know who Mrs. Smith is, so the new information on which the emphasis is laid is ' the first prize'. In the second sentence, however, the emphasis is laid on ' Mrs. Smith'. It is sometimes difficult to demarcate all these categories of meaning. For example, it may be difficult to distinguish between conceptual meaning and social meaning in the following sentences:

He stuck the key in his pocket. He put the key in his pocket. We could argue that these two sentences are conceptually alike, but different in social meaning——the first one adopts a casual or informal style, the second adopts a neutral style. However, we could also say that the two verbs are conceptually different: ' stuck' meaning ' put carelessly and quickly', which is a more precise meaning than simply ' put'. Of course, it is a matter of choice which word the speaker wishes to use, a more precise one or a neutral one.

Some Terms and Distinctions in Semantics (a) Lexical and grammatical meaning Lexical or word meaning is the meaning of individual lexical items. These are of two types: the open class lexical items, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, and the close class items such as prepositions, conjunctions and deter-miners. The open class items have independent meanings, which are defined in the dictionary. The closed class items have meaning only in relation to other words in a sentence; this is called grammatical meaning, which can be understood from a consideration of the structure of the sentence and its relation with other sentences. For example, in the sentence The tiger killed the elephant', there are three open class items: tiger, kill, elephant. Out of these, two are nouns and one is a verb. There is one closed class tern– 'the'–which occurs before each noun. It has no independent reference of its own and can have meaning only when placed before the nouns. This distinction may help in understanding ambiguity. Thus, if there is ambiguity in a sentence, this can be a lexical ambiguity or a grammatical ambiguity. For example, in the sentence: I saw him near the bank, there is lexical ambiguity, since the item ' bank' can mean (a) the financial institution or (b) the bank of a river. However, in the

case of: ' The parents of the bride and the groom were waiting' there is

grammatical ambiguity as the sentence structure can be interpreted in two

ways: (a) the two separate noun phrases being ' the parents of the bride',

and ' the groom'; or (b) the single noun phrase ' the parents' within which

there is the prepositional phrase ' of the bride and the groom' containing two

nouns. The first type of coordination gives us the meaning that the people

who were waiting were the parents of the bride and the groom himself. The

second type of coordination gives us the meaning that the people who were

waiting were the parents of the bride and the parents of the groom. The

meaning of a sentence is the product of both lexical and grammatical

meanings. This becomes clear if we compare a pair of sentences such as the

following: The dog bit the postman. The postman bit the dog. These two

sentences differ in meaning. But the difference in meaning is not due to the

difference in the meaning of the lexical items ' postman' and ' dog', but in

the grammatical relationship between the two. In one case ' dog' is the

subject and ' postman' is the object, in the other case the grammatical roles

are reversed. There is also the relationship of these nouns with the verb '

bit'. In the first sentence, the action is performed by the dog, which conforms

to our knowledge about dogs, but in the second sentence, the action is

performed by the postman which does not match with our knowledge about

what postmen do, so there is a sense of incongruity about the second

sentence. Only in some exceptional circumstance could we expect it to be

comprehensible. (b) Sense and Reference It has been explained earlier that

signs refer to concepts as well as to other signs. A sign is a symbol that

indicates a concept. This concept is the reference, which refers in turn to

some object in the real world, called the referent. The relationship between linguistic items (e. g. words, sentences) and the non-linguistic world of experience is a relationship of reference. It can be understood by the following diagram given by Ogden and Richards: The objects in the real world are referents, the concept which we have of them in our minds is the reference and the symbol we use to refer to them is the word, or linguistic item. As we have seen, we can explain the meaning of a linguistic item by using other words. The relation of a word with another word is a sense-relation. Therefore, sense is the complex system of relationships that holds between the linguistic items themselves. Sense is concerned with the intra-linguistic relations, i. e. relations within the system of the language itself, such as similarity between words, opposition, inclusion, and pre-supposition. Sense relations include homonymy, polysemy, synonymy and antonymy. Homonyms are different items (lexical items or structure words) with the same phonetic form. They differ only in meaning, e. g. the item ' ear' meaning ' organ of hearing' is a homonym of the item ' ear' meaning ' a stem of wheat'. Homonymy may be classified as: (a) Homography: a phenomenon of two or more words having the same spellings but different pronunciation or meaning, e. g. lead /led/ = metal; lead/li: d/ = verb. (b) Homophony: a phenomenon of two or more words having the same pronunciation but different meanings or spellings, e. g. sea/see, knew/new, some/ sum, sun/son. It is difficult to distinguish between homonymy and polysemy as in polysemy, the ' same' lexical item has different meanings, e. g. ' bank*', ' face*': Two lexical items can be considered as synonyms if they have the same denotative, connotative and social meaning and can replace

each other in all contexts of occurrence. Only then can they be absolutely synonymous. For example, ' radio' and ' wireless' co-existed for a while as synonyms, being used as alternatives by speakers of British English. But now, ' wireless' is not used frequently. What we consider as synonyms in a language are usually near-equivalent items, or descriptive items. For example, ' lavatory', ' toilet', ' WC', ' washroom' are descriptive or near-equivalent synonyms in English. Antonyms are lexical items which are different both in form as well as meaning. An antonym of a lexical item conveys the opposite sense, e. g. single-married, good-bad. But this gives rise to questions of what is an opposite or contrasted meaning. For example, the opposite of ' woman' could be ' man' or girl' since the denotation of both is different from that of ' woman'. Thus we need to modify our definition of antonymy. We can say that some items are less compatible than other items. There can be nearness of contrast or remoteness of contrast. Thus ' man' or ' girl' is contrasted to ' woman' but less contrasted than ' woman' and ' tree'. In this sense, ' woman' and ' man' are related, just as ' girl' and ' boy' are related, in spite of being contrasted. Other meaning-relations of a similar nature are: mare/stallion, cow/bull, ram/ewe etc., all based on gender distinctions. Another set of meaning relations can be of age and family relationship: father/son, uncle/nephew, aunt/ niece. In this, too, there are differences in the structures of different languages. In Urdu, for instance, gender distinction or contrast may be marked by a change in the ending of the noun (e. g. /gho: �a:/gho: �i:/ for ' horse' and ' mare' respectively) or, in some cases, by a different word (e. g. /ga: e/bael/ for ' cow' and ' bull' respectively). In English, there are usually different words to mark contrast in

gender except in a few cases (e. g. elephant, giraffe). The evolution of a complex system of sense relations is dependent on the way in which the objects of the world and the environment are perceived and conceptualized by the people who make that language. For example, Eskimos have many words related in meaning to ' snow' because snow in different forms is a part o their environment. In English, there are only two ' snow' and ' ice', while in Urdu there is only one: ' baraf'. This reflects the importance that a particular object or phenomena may have for a certain community. Another kind of sense-relationship is hyponymy. Hyponymy is the relation that holds between a more general and more specific lexical item. For example, ' flower' is a more general item, and ' rose', ' lily', etc. are more specific. The more specific item is considered a hyponym of the more general item–'rose' is a hyponym of ' flower'. The specific item includes the meaning of the general. When we say ' rose', the meaning of ' flower' is included in its meaning. ' Rose' is also hyponymous to ' plant' and ' living thing' as these are the most general categories. The combination of words to produce a single unit of meaning is also a part of sense-relations in a language. Compounds are made, which often do not mean the same as the separate words which they consist of. Thus, while ' black bird' can be understood to mean ' a bird which is black', ' strawberry' cannot be understood to mean ' a berry made of straw'. Similarly, ' fighter' can be considered to be a noun made up of the morphemes ' fight' + ' er', but ' hammer' cannot be considered as made up of ' ham' + ' er'. Phrasal verbs and idioms are also a case of such sense relations. The verbs ' face up to', ' see through', ' look upon', etc. have a composite meaning. Collocations such as ' heavy smoker'

and ' good singer' are not mere combinations of heavy + smoker meaning ' the smoker is heavy' or ' good + singer'. They mean ' one who smokes heavily' or ' one who sings well'. The collocated unit has a meaning which is a composite of both that is why we cannot say ' good smoker' and ' heavy singer'. All these sense-relations are peculiar to a language and every language develops its own system of sense-relations. (c) Sentence-meaning and Utterance-meaning A distinction may be drawn between, sentence-meaning and utterance-meaning. This is because a speaker may use a sentence to mean something other than what is normally stated in the sentence itself. As discussed earlier, sentence meaning is a combination of lexical and grammatical meaning. In addition to this, intonation may also affect sentence meaning. For example, ' I don't like COFFEE' means that the speaker does not like coffee, but may like some other drink; ' I don't like coffee' means that the speaker doesn't like coffee but someone else does. Speakers can use intonation to change the emphasis and thus the meaning of the sentence. Further, a sentence may be used by a speaker to perform some act, such as the act of questioning, warning, promising, threatening, etc. Thus, a sentence such as ' Its cold in here' could be used as an order or request to someone to shut the window, even though it is a declarative sentence. Similarly, an interrogative sentence such as ' Could you shut the door?' can be used to perform the act of requesting or commanding rather than that of questioning (The speaker is not asking whether the hearer is able to shut the door, but is requesting the hearer to actually do the action). Usually such use of sentences is so conventional that we do not stop to think of the literal sentence meaning, we respond to the speaker's act of

requesting, etc., which is the utterance meaning. This is the meaning that a sentence has when a speaker utters it to perform some act, in particular appropriate circumstances. (d) Entailment and Presupposition One sentence may entail other sentence–that is, include the meaning of other sentence in its meaning, just as hyponymy includes the meaning of other word. For example, the sentence ' The earth goes round the sun' entails (includes) the meaning ' The earth moves'. A sentence may presuppose other sentences, e. g. the sentence ' Shamim's son is named Rahat' presupposes the sentence ' Shamim has a son'. Presupposition is the previously known meaning which is implied in the sentence. While entailment is a logical meaning inherent in the sentence, presupposition may depend on the knowledge of the facts, shared by the speaker and the hearer. Theories of Semantics a) Traditional Approach: We have noted earlier that meaning was always a central concern with thinkers. This has been the root of much divergent opinions and definitions of meaning. However, there was little doubt that there are two sides of the issue : symbolic realization, whether in utterance or in writing, and the thing symbolised. Plato's Cratylus clearly lays down that word is the signifier (in the language) and the signified is the object (in the world). Words are, therefore, names, labels that denote or stand for. Initially, a child learns to know his world, and his language in this manner. He is pointed out the objects and people; names are given to them, and in his mind link or association between the names and the external world is established. Children have always been taught their language in this manner. This is also perhaps the way the earliest thinkers tried to understand the world through linguistic medium. That could be the reason why William Labov was

prompted to say, ' In many ways, the child is a perfect historian of the language'. This simple view of the relationship between name and things is diagrammatically shown below. However, this is an extremely simplistic theory and it would be wrong to say the child simply learns the names of things. Gradually, and simultaneously, he learns to ' handle the complexities of experience along with the complexities of language'. b) Analytical/Referential Approach: Between the symbol and the object/thing there is an intervening phenomenon which is recognized as ' the mediation of concepts of the mind'. De Saussure and I. A. Richards and C. K. Ogden are the best-known scholars to hold this view. The Swiss linguist de Saussure postulated the link, a psychological associative bond, between the sound image and the concept. Ogden and Richards viewed this in the shape of a triangle. The linguistic symbol or image, realized as a word or sentence and the referent, the external entities are mediated by thought or reference. There is no direct relation between the sign and the object but ' our interpretation of any sign is our psychological reaction to it' (Ogden). The meaning of a word in the most important sense of the word is that part of a total reaction to the word which constitutes the thought about what the word is intended for and what it symbolizes. Thus thought (the reference) constitutes the symbolic or referential meaning of a word (YevgenyBasin : 32-33). Linguistics, in the opinion of de Saussure, operates on the borderland where the elements of sound and thought combine : their combination produces a form, not a substance. When we see an object, a bird, for example, we call it referent; its recollection is its image. It is through this image that the sign is linked to the referent. The symbol is manifested in the

phonetic form and the reference is the information the hearer is conveyed. This process thus established, makes meaning a ' reciprocal' and reversible relation between name and sense. One can start with the name and arrive at the meaning or one can start with the meaning and arrive at the name/s. The referential or ' analytical' approach, as it is also known, tries to avoid the functional domain of language, and seeks rather to understand meaning by identifying its primary components. This approach is the descendant of the ancient philosophical world-view, and carries its limitations. It ignores the relatively different positions at which the speaker and the hearer are situated. Their positions make a reciprocal and reversible relationship between name and sense (Ullmann). This approach also overlooks other psychological, non-physical processes which donot depend upon the linguistic symbol, the reception of the sound waves for recognising the meaning of the object/thing. A word usually has multiple meaning and is also associated with other words. Which of the meanings will be received depends upon the situations. (c) Functional Approach In the year 1953 L. Wittgenstein's work Philosophical Investigation was published. Around this time Malinowski and J. R. Firth were working to formulate the ' operational character of scientific concepts like ' length', ' time' or ' energy'; they tried to grasp the meaning of a word by observing the uses to which it is put instead of what is said about it. They approached the problem by including all that is relevant in establishing the meaning — the hearers, their commonly shared knowledge and information, external objecs, and events, the contexts of earlier exchange and so on, and not by excluding them. This approach can directly be linked to the concept of the Context of situation

being developed by the London group which viewed social processes as significant factor in explaining a speech event. While the referential approach took an idealist position, dealing, as someone said, with ' meaning in language', the functional theory or the operational theory took a realistic stand, taking ' speech' as it actually occurred. Words are considered tools and whole utterances are considered. Meaning is thus seen to involve a ' set of multiple and various relations between the utterances' and its segments and the relevant components of environment' (Robins). In placing special emphasis on language as a form of behaviour — as something that we perform, the functional approach shares a lot with systemic linguistics. Language is a form a behaviour which is functional, ' something that we do with a purpose, or more often, in fact, with more than one purpose. It is viewed as a form of functional behaviour which is related to the social situation in which it occurs as something that we do purposefully in a particular social setting' (Margaret Berry). The systemic organization of a language is sought to be understood through its relations with the social situations of language. According to this theory, meaning is classified into two broad categories, Contextual Meaning and Formal Meaning. Contextual meaning relates a formal item or pattern to an element of situation. There is a regular association between a linguistic item and something which is extra-linguistic, ' something which is part of the situation of language rather than part of the language itself' (Berry). Contextual meaning is further divided into thesis, immediate situation and wider situation. In Formal meaning The relationship between a linguistic item, pattern or term form a system and other linguistic items, patterns or terms from system belonging to the same

level of language'. Formal meaning can be understood by collocating and contrasting a lexical item with other lexial items. The lexical item cat, for instance, has the potentiality for collocating with mew, purr, lap, milk, fur, tail, etc. It also contrasts with dog, mouse, kitten, etc. Thus, the complete description of the formal meaning of a lexical item would involve the statement of all the items with which it collocates and contrasts. Such items which fall into a context or set of contexts are referred to as an association field. (d) Field Theory of Meaning: Basic to this theory is the concept that each word in a language is surrounded by a network of associations that connect it with other terms. The field theory visualizes the vocabulary as a mosaic on a gigantic scale, which is built up of fields and higher unitsin the same way as fields are built up by words. The associative field of a word is formed by an intricate network of associations, some based on similarity, others on continuity, some arising between senses, others between names, others again between both. The field is by definition open, and some of the associations are bound to be subjective though the more central ones will be largely the same for most speakers. Attempts have been made to identify some of these central associations by psychological experiments, but they can also be established by purely linguistic methods. The identification of these associations by linguistic methods is done by collecting the most obvious synonyms and antonyms of a word, as well as terms similar in sound or in sense, and those which enter into the same habitual associations. Many of these associations are embodied in figurative language: metaphors, similes, proverbs, idioms, and the link. The number of associations centred in one word will of course be extremely variable and for some very common

terms it may be very high. As one of Saussure's pupils expressed it, ' the associative field is a halo which surrounds the sign and whose exterior fringes become merged'. This field is formed by an intricate network of associations: similarity, contiguity, sensation, name. The associative field is by any definition open, that is, no finite limits can be assigned to any given field. Hence the aptness of the concept ' field', which serves an analogous purpose in physics. Semantic Structure or Name-Sense Relation Words form certain kinds of relations. These are called sense relations that are paradigmatic and syntagmatic. Below we discuss five such major sense-relationships. 1. Hyponymy 2. Synonymy 3. Antonymy 4. Polysemy 5. Homonymy Hyponymy This refers to the way language classifies its words on the principle of inclusiveness, forming a class members of which are then called co-hyponyms. For example, the classical Greek has a ' super ordinate' term to cover professions of various kinds, shoemaker, helmsman, flute player, carpenter, etc. but such a term doesn't exist in English. In English the word ' animal' is used to include all living in contrast to the vegetable world. Hyponymous sets can also be seen in such combinations denoting male-female-baby in dog-bitch-puppy; ram-ewe-lamb; when such terms do not exist, they are formed: female giraffe, male giraffe, baby giraffe. Thus the meaning of male giraffe is included in the meaning of giraffe as is the meaning of baby giraffe and female giraffe. The relationship of inclusiveness rests on the concept of reference. This gives us the idea of how a language classifies words. Words that are members of a class are called hyponyms. Synonymy refers to similarity or ' sameness of meaning'. This is a handy concept for the dictionary makers, who need words for one word which have

greater degree of similarity. To an extent this is acceptable, it is a working concept. However, one cannot disagree with Dr. Johnson's statement that ' words are seldom exactly synonymous'. In actual use where contextual nuances and situational subtleties influence meanings the degree of similarity among words reduces considerably to signify much, each word acts as a potential token of sense. Form the great literary scholars to the semanticists all agree that it is almost a truism that total synonymy is an extremely tale occurrence'. It is clear that in considering synonymy ' emotive or cognitive import' has critical role. In the words of Ullmann, to qualify as synonyms they must be capable of replacing' ' cach other in any given context without the slightest change either in cognitive or emotive import'. John Lyon also stresses equivalence of cognitive and emotive sense. Except for highly technical and scientific items, words used in everyday language have strongly emotional or associative significance. Libertyfreedom; Jude-conceal; attempt-effort, cut-slash; round-circular; have different evocative or emotive values; in a particular context where freedom is used liberty definitely cannot be used : it is always freedom struggle and not liberty struggle; or freedom movement not liberty movement. Clear in this instance freedom acts as modifier while liberty does not. Antonymy The concept of antonymy implies ' oppositeness of meaning' where the ' recognition and assertion of one implies the denial of the other'. This is illustrated in pairs of words such as, big-small; old-young; wide-narrow, etc. These words can be handled in terms of the degree of quality involved. The comparative forms of the adjectives are graded : wide-wider; happy-happier; old-older. They are also made by adding more. To use Sapir's term, these are explicitly graded.

Polysemy When a word is identified as possessing two or more meanings, it is; said to be polysemous or polysemic. These different meanings are derived from one basic idea or concept. Dictionaries enter different meanings of a word. Head, for example, has the following different meanings : the upper or anterior division of the body, scat of intellect, mind, poise, the obverse of a coin, person, individual, the source of a stream, leader, director, crisis, culminating point of action, etc (Webster's Dictionary). All these meanings derive from the same word. From this have been coined as many as seventy, compound structures, each in the right of a different word such as headsman, headstand, headshop, headpiece, headgear, headlamp, headline, headlong, head-dress, etc. In the latter examples, one can see that the noun acts as adjectives which show contextual shifts of application. Problems arise when it becomes difficult to determine whether a word with several meanings must he called polysemic or homonomous. Homonymy Homonomous words are defined as sounding alike hut possessing different meanings. For example, the words lie-lie, by-bye, I-eye. They are spoken and sometimes, written alike, but mean totally different things, as can be seen in their uses in these sentences - Don't lie, tell the truth. I have to lie down now. Normally, in dictionaries, separate entries are made for homonymous words recognising them as separate Words rather than different meanings of the same words. Homophonous words may be spelled and written identically or in different ways. The example cited above elucidates the point. For the words that are spelled alike the name homography is used. For the words that sound alike but may be spelled differently, the term homophony is used. Examples of the former are grave-grave; pupil-pupil; light-light; examples of

the latter are cite-site; write-right-rite-might. Some homophones are also, interestingly, antonyms - raise-raze; cleave in the sense of severing asunder and cleave in the sense of ' uniting'. The problem of identifying which is a homonym and which a polyseme is a practical one and often it is difficult to determine exactly what is what. However, it is useful to know that homonymous words have generally different origins, while polysemic words, even when their meanings arc markedly divergent, have one source. We may use such metaphorical expressions as the foot of a bed, or the mountain; the hands and face of a clock, but we know that these are the meanings that ultimately trace to the original meanings of these words. They are, therefore, polysemes. Tracing the lexical etymologies is fraught with difficulties. One must have a vast knowledge of the histories of the words. Confusion between polysemy and homonymy is natural. Collocation An important concept in semantics is that of collocation, which recognises ' the association of a lexical item with other lexical items'. J. R. Firth says, ' you shall know a word by the company it keeps'. What he calls keeping company is what we know by collocation. It is par t of the meaning of a word. Thus the word red is related to blood, rose, tomato, ink, cherry, etc. or to put it differently, red collocates with these words. Different linguistic contexts enable us to identity different meanings. Thus, for the word table we can identify these meanings front the contexts presented below. i) writing table ii) reading table iii) have tabled the motion iv) talk across the table Most associations are loose with a freedom of movement that is not predictable. We can say white milk, but we can also say ' while clouds and ' white paint'. We can contrast this with such predictable collocations as blond hair, buxom

woman and pretty girl or child. Blond cannot be collocated with door or dress. Buxom always goes with female individual - a buxom friend would mean a buxom woman friend and cannot mean a man. Similarly, a pretty boy is not heard. A more permanent collocation is seen in ' bark' always being associated with ' dog', ' roar' with ' lion' ' chirp' with ' birds', ' school' with ' fishes', ' flock' with birds etc. In collocation words get special meaning. Exceptional conditions and exceptional boy do not really mean the same thing. So, the meaning of the collocated terms depends on the collocation. ' A word will often collocate with a number of other words that have something in common semantically. More strikingly ... we find that individual words or sequences of words will NOT collocate with certain groups of words' (Palmer : 78). To ' die' and to ' pass away' refer to the same happening, but to say that daffodil passes away, is absurd, more acdeptable is to say ' daffodil dies'. F. R. Palmer has identified three types of collocational restrictions. 1. Meaning in this type is completely based on die word. Green horse is an unlikely collocational combination. 2. Here meaning is based on the range, which makes, a pretty boy unacceptable. 3. This kind of restriction involves neither range nor meaning : rancid butter, addled brains are a couple of examples.