

## Chapter 2

### Some Basic Concepts in Semantics

#### What is a sentence?

A sentence is an ideal string of words formed in accordance with the grammatical rules of language. As a unit of grammar, it is higher than the clause, just as the clause is higher than the phrase and the phrase is higher than the word.

#### What is an utterance?

An utterance is any stretch of language spoken by a person at a certain time and place and on a certain occasion. Like a sentence, it is by definition a meaningful stretch of language. A meaningless sequence of sounds cannot be considered an utterance. To (Utter) means (To say) something. So when you talk, you are making an utterance.

For example, when you say "24" in a math class, you are making an utterance, or when you say "good boy" to your dog, you are making an utterance too. EVEN a Long (Speech) in the present is an utterance.

#### Example:

*I would like a cup of coffee* (Is a sentence).

"Coffee, please" is not a complete sentence; it is simply an utterance.

#### What is a proposition?

A proposition is the semantic content of a simple declarative sentence. Just as the sentence is essentially a grammatical concept, the proposition is essentially a semantic concept.

#### Examples:

*John is a teacher.*

*You are late.*

*The book is on the table.*

### **What are the Differences between a Sentence and an Utterance?**

1. An utterance need not be in the form of a complete sentence having a clearly identifiable subject and a clearly identifiable verb. It may well be in the form of only a word (yes/hello/thanks), a phrase (at seven o'clock in the morning), or a clause operating as a full sentence. Let us consider the following three pieces of conversation.

(a) Q: Will you be here tomorrow?

A: Yes.

(b) Q: What time is he arriving here tomorrow?

A: At seven o'clock in the morning.

(c) Q: When did he arrive here yesterday?

A: After I had finished all my work.

The first answer is a word, the second is a phrase, and the third is a clause. Irrespective of its grammatical status, each one of these three stretches of language will be an utterance when spoken.

2. An utterance need not be in the form of a sentence or its part. it may be in the form of a number of sentences in a sequence.

3. An utterance is necessarily a physical event. Just as a sentence begins with a capital letter and ends with an end-punctuation mark, an utterance is preceded and followed by silence.

4. If a stretch of language is uttered twice, it will be two utterances and not one. If it is uttered three times, it will be three utterances. An utterance is a physical event and not only a grammatical structure.

5. An utterance can be slow or fast, faint or loud. This cannot be applied to sentences.

*6. Since an utterance is essentially the spoken form of a language, it can be characterized by the accent and voice quality of the speaker, which are not features of sentences.*

### **Differences between a Sentence and a Proposition**

1. A sentence is a string of words in a certain order. If we change the order of words, it becomes another sentence. But if the change in the word order means no change in the meaning of that sentence and the sentence remains a simple declarative sentence, it continues to be the same proposition. Example:

(a) He gave away the books.

(b) He gave the books away.

(c) He looked up that word in the dictionary.

(d) He looked that word up in the dictionary.

The two different sentences whose meaning is the same can be treated as two variants of the same proposition, not two different propositions. We can say that the same proposition can be expressed in different sentences.

2. A new sentence is formed when sentence elements change, but if the meaning stays the same, it remains the same proposition despite the structural changes.

(a) *John envies Jim.*

(b) *John is envious of Jim.*

3: A change in the voice of a sentence makes it another sentence, but a change in the voice of a simple declarative sentence does not make it another proposition.

(a) *John Keats wrote this poem.*

(b) *This poem was written by John Keats.*

Sentences listed as (a) and (b) are two separate sentences, but they are not two different propositions. As the propositional content of these two sentences is the same, we can call these two sentences two variants of the same proposition but not examples of two different propositions.

4- Propositions, unlike sentences, cannot be said to belong to any particular language. Sentences in different languages can correspond to the same proposition if the two sentences are perfect translations of each other.

### **Example**

The proposition “the sun rises in the east” can be translated into various languages:

English: *the sun rises in the east.*

French: *le soleil se leve a l’est*

Arabic: تشرق الشمس من الشرق

Even though these sentences are grammatically and syntactically different, they all correspond to the same preposition (the idea that the sun rises in the east).

So in the end, propositions can be regarded as **abstract semantic entities**, sentences can be regarded as **linguistic/grammatical entities**, and utterances can be regarded as **actions**.

### **What are the types of sentences depending on propositional meaning?**

There are five (analytic sentences, synthetic sentences, contradiction, entailment, and paraphrase).

**a- Analytic Sentence:** is a sentence with propositional content that is necessarily true because of the meanings of the words used in that sentence; *examples are "dogs are animals," "bachelors are male," and "books are not meat."*

**b- Synthetic Sentence:** one that is not analytic but may be either true or false, depending on the way the world is; for example, *Erick steals Emma's wallet, children wear hats, John is a very good teacher, and lions live for about 30 years.*

**c- Contradiction:** is a sentence the propositional content of which is necessarily false because of the meanings of the words used in that sentence, for example / *elephants are not animals, cats are fish, a man is a butterfly,* and *"That man is my brother's wife."*

**d- Entailment:** a relationship that applies between two sentences and propositions, where the truth of one of them implies the truth of the other because of the meaning of the words involved. For example:

A: yesterday, I met a great scholar.

B: yesterday I met a person.

A: Mary killed Barbara.

B: Barbara died.

A: John is Bill's father.

B: Bill is John's son.

### Note

An entailment can be either unilateral or bilateral. In the following cases, for example, proposition A entails proposition B, but proposition B does not entail proposition A.

A: *He is from India.*

B: *He is from Asia.*

A: *Mary killed Barbara.*

B: *Barbara died.*

A: *Jane ate all the mangoes.*

B: *Someone ate something.*

In the following cases, proposition A entails proposition B, and, likewise, proposition B entails proposition A.

A: Mona resembles Barbara.

B: Barbara resembles Mona.

A: This place is different from that place.

B: That place is different from this place.

A: John is richer than James.

B: James is poorer than John.

A **paraphrase** is a sentence that conveys the same meaning as another sentence.

A: John sold that car to Mary.

B: Mary bought that car from John.

A: My father owns all these four apartments.

B: All these four apartments belong to my father.

A: Peter is the parent of Hamilton.

B: Hamilton is the child of Peter.

A: Shakespeare wrote Macbeth.

B: Macbeth was written by Shakespeare.

In these four pairs of sentences, A is the paraphrase of B just as B is the paraphrase of A.

### **Sense and Reference**

Sense deals with relationships inside the language, like the relationships between words, phrases, and sentences in a language. Words like "and," "or," "if," "therefore," "because," "perhaps," and "almost" do not refer to any person, place, or thing in the outside world. They have sense but no reference.

Reference is a relationship between parts of language and things outside the language (in the world), as the phrase "Eiffel Tower" refers to a tower in Paris. So the referent of a word is the person, place, or thing for which that word is used.

### **Q/ Does "reference" signify proper nouns only?**

No, not only proper nouns, but also countable nouns

### **Q/ What is the referent of the words *crocodile*, and *lion*?**

The word "**lion**" refers to all those large, strong, flesh-eating animals found in Asia and Africa that are known as lions.



The word "**crocodile**" refers to the large, ferocious, man-eating reptiles found in rivers.

**Reference** deals with the relationship between the linguistic elements (words, sentences, etc.) and the non-linguistic world of experience.

**Sense** relates to the complex system of relationships that hold between the linguistic elements themselves (mostly the words); it is concerned only with intralinguistic relations.

There are words in every language, however, that do not refer to anything in the world outside that language. Words like "and," "or," "if," "therefore," "because," "perhaps," "almost," "certainly," and "for example" do not refer to any person, place, or thing in the outside world. These words have sense but no reference.

**Q/ Do the expressions (big) and (large) have the same sense in these sentences?**

a- I live in a big house.

b- I live in a large house.

Yes, they have the same sense.

**Q/ Why is it essential to understand both sense and reference?**

The understanding of both sense and reference is essential to a proper understanding of the meaning of meaning.

**Q/ Are the two terms used interchangeably?**

In non-technical languages, the two are sometimes used interchangeably, but the difference between them is considered crucial in semantics.

## **Denotation & Connotation**

**The denotation** of a word is the object or objects that it refers to in the world outside language. The denotation of the word "elephant" refers specifically to all the actual elephants that exist around the world.

**The connotation** of a word is the incidental meaning that we associate with a word from time to time. Some of the connotations of the word "woman" are tender, sensitive, sentimental, kind, patient, and likely to shed tears.

**Connotation** is the emotional and imaginative association surrounding a word. Denotation is the strict dictionary meaning of a word. For example, the word "snake": the denotation of "snake" is an animal that has a long, thin body and no arms or legs. The connotation of snake is evil, danger, sin, and deceit.

### **Q\ What is the comparison between denotation and connotation in semantics?**

#### **Denotation**

#### **Connotation**

Refers to the literal, dictionary definition of a word

Refers to the additional, implied, or emotional meaning that a word carries beyond its literal definition

(objective meaning)

Direct, explicit meaning of the word

(subjective meaning)

Can vary from person to person based on personal feelings, emotions, or cultural background.

usually remains more or less the same (stable across contexts)

in many cases changes from one culture to another and from one individual to another (context-dependent)

Literal meaning

Emotional or cultural meaning

Example

The word "*snake*" denotatively means "a legless, carnivorous reptile with scales."

Example

The word "*snake*" connotatively might suggest treachery, danger, or deceit (based on cultural and emotional associations).