5.2 SUPPLEMENTARY EXERCISES

converse

5.11 One kind of antonymy occurs when one predicate expresses the same relation as the other but with the arguments reversed – the CONVERSE of the relation (Chapter 3). Give converses for the following predicates, and state both sentences as predicate-argument formulas.

a 12 is twice 6.
b Tokyo is bigger than London.
c Chomsky was a student of Harris.
d Elizabeth I succeeded Mary.
e Belgrade is below Vienna (on the Danube).

5.12 Strictly speaking only two-place relations have converses. However some three-place predicates are related by a similar permutation of their arguments (e.g. 'John gave the book to Mary' vs 'Mary received the book from John'). Imagine the following scenario: Don Marino hands Antonio a gun, and Antonio hands Don Marino a thousand dollars. Express this using the three-place verbs 'buy', 'sell', 'cost' and 'fetch'.

5.13 The levels of a semantic network do not seem to have the same status. Study the following examples.

a The following form part of a semantic network:

labrador dog bitch mammal animal quadruped

i Draw the network
ii It was suggested above that properties were 'inherited' by more specific nodes from more general nodes. What are the most general nodes introducing the following properties, and which hyponyms inherit them?
1 Need for exercise.
2 Ability to suckle offspring.
3 Having four legs.
iii Which words fit more naturally into the following sentences:
1 It's time to take my [ ] for a walk.
2 Look at that [ ] suckling its puppies.
3 My [ ] is on heat.
4 That [ ] is limping around on three legs.

Which word would you *expect* the properties described to be associated with, given your answers to a(ii)?

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6 THINGS AND EVENTS

At the top level (the most general level) of a semantic network, most word senses can be grouped under certain extremely general concepts such as *thing* or *event*. These have certain important semantic characteristics, which have important effects on the ways in which they can be expressed in language. It will be convenient to discuss them by taking nouns and verbs in turn – though you should be careful of assuming that this distinction always corresponds to that between things and events.

First consider the following scenario, and the various ways in which it might appropriately be described. A dragon has his eye on a hoard of treasure, comprising gold rings.

(6.1) 1 (a) *The dragon saw a gold.
(b) The dragon saw some gold.
(c) *The dragon saw some golds.
(d) The dragon saw a heap/some heaps of gold.

2 (a) The dragon saw a ring.
(b) *The dragon saw some ring.
(c) The dragon saw some rings.
(d) The dragon saw a heap/some heaps of rings.

This shows that 'gold' and 'ring' are acceptable in different kinds of syntactic environment. This is due, however, to an important *semantic* difference. The point is that gold is conceptualized as a substance, whereas artefacts like rings are thought of as individual items. This correlates with a number of differences, both linguistic and non-linguistic. For example rings are countable in a straightforward way, whereas you can only compare quantities of gold by introducing some notion of measure (even a crude measure like a *heap* that a dragon might be able to individuate). Moreover if you divide gold into pieces each piece remains *gold*, whereas if you break up a ring what you have left is not a ring. However if you scatter

rings (in the plural) over the floor of your cave they still remain rings – plurals of countable nouns behave in some respects like uncountable ones, both logically and grammatically (6.1).

A good test is provided by the phrase 'all over (something)'.[1] It will accept mass nouns like gold but not countable nouns (unless they are plural, in which case they can be distributed without losing their identity).

(6.2) 1 There was gold all over the floor.
2 ?? There was ring all over the floor.
3 There were rings all over the floor.

Note that the second sentence is not completely unacceptable, but it forces an unusual reading, in which 'ring' is re-interpreted as a mass (perhaps the dragon has breathed on it and melted it). This effect generally occurs with countable nouns in this environment.

(6.3) 1 The pro-director ended up with *sandwich* all over his face.
2 After the accident there was *dog* all over the road.

EXERCISE ✎

6.4 Which of these nouns are countable and which are 'mass' nouns? For the latter, suggest a suitable 'measure word'.

coal sheep news money lamb sugar
iron rice beer chocolate information

6.5 When a mass noun is treated as a countable noun, again a re-interpretation is forced (this is often referred to as CONSTRUAL). How are the mass nouns 'whisky' and 'wine' construed in these sentences?

construal

1 This really is a fine whisky.
2 We've got some new wines in this year.

(The examples in (6.1) and (6.4) are syntactic facts about English, but the underlying semantic difference between countable and mass nouns is an important one which is reflected in different ways in many languages.)

The situations described by verbs also have important distinctions (important to us, once again, because they are reflected in language). The first is between states and events.

(6.6) 1 Istanbul overlooks the Bosporus.
2 The child was asleep.
3 Mozart died in 1791.
4 One of the soldiers coughed.

In the first two sentences nothing is happening. The sentences describe states – the first one permanent, the second temporary. In the latter case presumably the child has fallen asleep and will wake up again, but the sentence ignores these events. It is like a still photograph (as opposed to a movie). The last two sentences, by contrast, describe events. Predicates describing events are normally verbs. Those describing states may be verbs, or they may be other expressions attached with a copula (recall that this happens to be a grammatical requirement in English).

It is important to distinguish between states which are a permanent property of an individual (or relation between individuals) and those which merely describe a phase they are going through. A good example is this well-known exchange involving Winston Churchill:

(6.7) 'Mr Churchill, you are drunk.'
'You, Madam, are ugly. And tomorrow – I shall be sober.'

At least as used here, *ugly* is assumed to be an intrinsic property of an individual, which is arguably how language tends to treat it (whether or not this is literally true). One test is that intrinsic properties co-occur naturally with generalized statements about classes of individuals:

(6.8) 1 'Snakes are poisonous.'
2 ?? 'Snakes are asleep.'
3 'Semanticists are ugly.'
4 ?? 'Semanticists are drunk.'

The last two statements are about equally reasonable (or unreasonable) things to want to say, but linguistically 3 holds together much better than 4. This is because of the difference between intrinsic properties and temporary phases.[2]

If STATIVE predicates (predicates describing states) are like a still photograph, it shouldn't be surprising that EVENTIVE predicates may represent a change from one state to another, like two successive slides.

stative
eventive

✎ **EXERCISE**

6.9 How would you characterize the states before and after each of these events?

a The plane took off.
b Louise tidied her room.
c Gandalf lit a fire.
d Toad arrived at the party.
e The hobbit disappeared.

How much do the sentences tell us about the way the change is effected?

At the other end of the scale we have verbs which describe an action or activity, but may not tell us much about the result (if any). Typically the hyponyms of these verbs will give us more detail about the manner in which the action is carried out. (In this case it might be better to gloss the hyponym relation as 'a way of' rather than 'a kind of'.)

EXERCISE ✎

6.10 Suggest some hyponyms for the verbs in italics. What extra information would they give?

a The men *walked* down the corridor.
b The tyrant liked to *kill* his enemies.
c Paul *asked* Louise to lend him some money.
d When she had finished she *told* the answer to Mary.
e The vandals spent half an hour *hitting* the sculptures.

How much do the hyponyms tell us about the result of the action?

In most of these cases you could take a snapshot of the action in progress, as if frozen in time. Clearly it would be a much more vivid snapshot if one of the hyponyms were chosen. The hyponyms tell us more about the characteristic manner of an action, or some instrument that is used, and a picture or charade showing this is often all we need in order to understand what action is taking place.

In many cases (like the first sentence in (6.10)), the situation described by the verb can be characterized purely in these terms. These may be called 'ACTIVITY verbs'. These have a number of syntactic and semantic properties.

activity

Take an instance of an activity like that denoted by 'walk' in 'John and Mary walked on the beach'. Any part of the time covered by that activity can also be described by the sentence 'John and Mary walked on the beach'. This is rather like the situation with *gold* described above, where if you have any quantity of *gold*, any part of it is also *gold.*

EXERCISE ✎

6.11 Which of the following sentences have this property?

a The plane circled over the airfield.
b Katia danced beautifully.
c Maria cleared the table.
d The men hammered at the sheet of metal.
e The ship sailed round the world.

Another striking feature of activities appears if the verb form in these sentences is replaced by the verb form 'was . . . -ing'. This has the effect of freezing the action at a particular point of time, as in the snapshots described earlier.

(6.12) 1 John and Mary walked on the beach.
2 John and Mary were walking on the beach.

These two sentences imply each other, and thus have the same truth conditions. If they walked on the beach, then at any given time they were walking on the beach, and could be photographed doing so. Conversely if we know that at some point they were walking on the beach, then we can assert that they walked on the beach.

✎ **EXERCISE**

6.13 Apply this test to the sentences in (6.11). Does it yield the same results as the previous test?

If the action includes the idea of a change of state, then this no longer holds, precisely because the change of state implies that the action is completed. Seeing earlier stages of the action in progress does not imply that the action was ever completed. (Arriving at a destination is a particular case of a change of state, which might be termed 'change of location'.)

(6.14) 1 John ran to the phone box.
2 John was running to the phone box.

Here the implication only holds in one direction – the second sentence does not imply that John ever made it. He could have tripped over and ended up in hospital instead. Equally if you take one stage of his running to the phone box, that cannot be described by the sentence 'he ran to the phone box'. Only the complete action can. This is analogous to the situation with countable nouns: only a complete ring is a ring, a fragment of it is only a bit of gold.

Events which specify a point where the action is complete – for example a change of state or location – are known as TELIC (the opposite is ATELIC).

telic
atelic

Given these parallels between things and events, it is not surprising that sometimes the two interact.

✎ **EXERCISE**

6.15 Applying the tests you have studied in this chapter, state whether the expressions in square brackets are count or mass nouns. Then test whether the events described are telic or atelic. What is the correlation between the two results?

a The orchestra played [music].
b The orchestra played [a symphony].
c The orchestra played [symphonies]
d The orchestra played [three symphonies].

6.1 SUMMARY

This chapter has looked at ways in which language structures things and events, two of the cornerstones of the way it analyses the world. Some simple examples have been given of the way in which the grammatical structure of a language (English) is sensitive to these underlying semantic considerations.

Often, it is the semantic requirements of an event that dictate what elements you can actually have in a sentence. This was discussed from a different point of view in Chapter 3, where the roles required by a situation determine how many arguments a predicate should have. It will also be the main theme of the final chapter (9).

Several times in the last few chapters you have encountered arguments which are not individual names but phrases like 'all snakes' or 'three symphonies'. The next chapter will discuss ways of dealing with such expressions.

6.2 SUPPLEMENTARY EXERCISES ✎

6.16 Are the following actions telic or atelic?

lock tie appear cover embark connect

Many verbs have the opposite meaning when 'un-' or 'dis-' is added. (This particular kind of antonym is known as a 'reversive'.) What is reversed in each case, an activity or a change of state?

6.17 Look at the following sentences

a i Maria hit him, then she hit him again.
ii The light flashed, then it flashed again.

b iii The ice melted, then it froze again.
iv The water froze, then it melted again.

What does 'again' contribute in each case? Why is the effect different in the second pair of sentences?

6.18 Look at how the following sentences can be built up. At each stage are they telic or atelic? Try to isolate what it is that has this effect in each case.

a i John and Harry lurched along.
ii John and Harry lurched along to the club.
iii John and Harry lurched along to the club every night.
iv John and Harry lurched along to the club every night for two months.

b i The light flashed.
ii The light flashed for two hours.
iii The light flashed for two hours every night.
iv The light flashed for two hours every night for a week

c i Laura cried.
ii Laura cried herself to sleep.
iii Laura cried herself to sleep every night.
iv Laura cried herself to sleep every night for a week.

6.19 It was noted above (Exercise 2.24) that two statements joined by '&' sometimes have different truth conditions if you reverse the order. To which of these examples does this apply? Suggest an explanation.

a Louise sang and danced.
b Louise was singing and dancing.
c Eleni drank a bottle of retsina and fell asleep.
d Eleni was drinking a bottle of retsina and falling asleep.
e Budapest is below Vienna and above Belgrade.

NOTES

1 Except when dealing with certain abstract nouns, to which concepts of location and distribution may not apply.
2 If you introduce the word 'always' judgements may change. This is because you are introducing an element of *time*, which goes better with temporary states.