

11. Words & Meaning I

Introduction to Language (Ling 201)

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For tonight's class:

1. Project presentations
 - 5 minutes to present
 - 5 minutes for Q&A

~Optional: Break~

2. Semantics
3. For next week

Project Presentations

Before presenting, I want each group to write me a final card reporting:

- Who all was in your group?
 - What language family did you work on?
 - What language did you work on?
-
- Each group should turn in just one of these. I'll collect them in a few minutes.

Presentations

Semantics

- What does “good” mean?

He’s a good dog.

This is good pizza.

She’s too good for you.

Good for you!

Good for you.

Good.

- What does “the city” mean?

I’m going to the city.

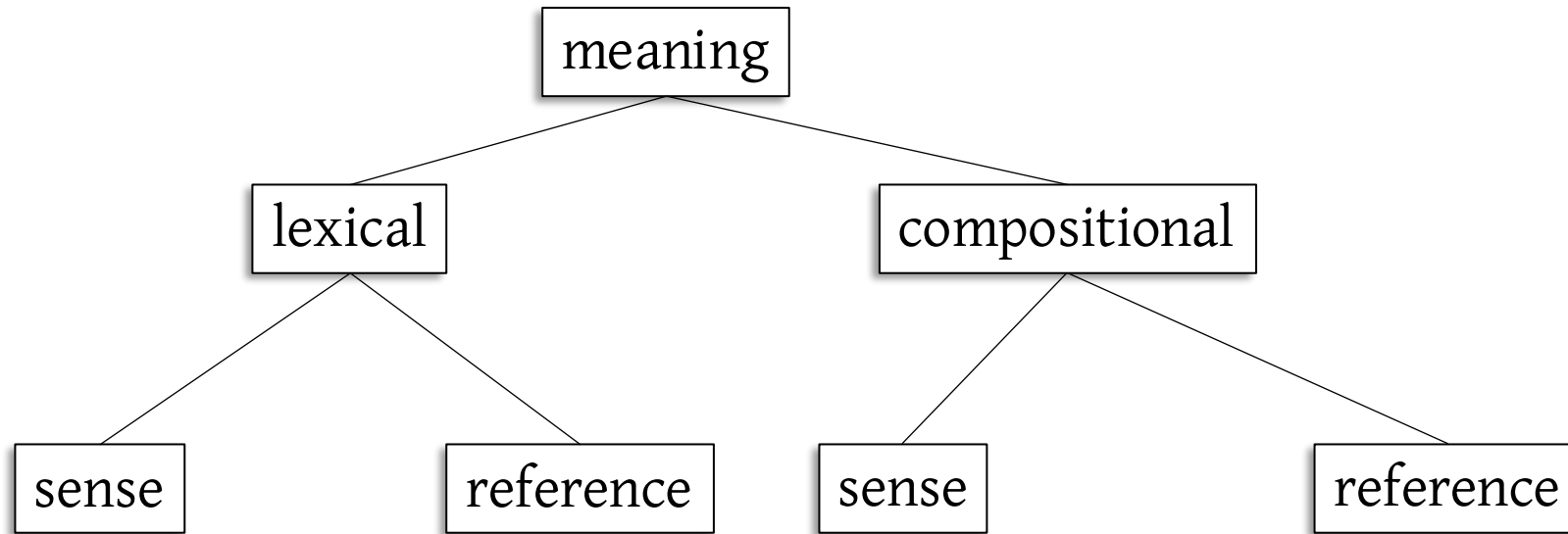
I’ve never been to the city.

Staten Island is part of the city.

The city is New York.

The city is Philadelphia.

I like the city better than the country.



Lexical meaning applies to words.

Compositional meaning applies to phrases and sentences.

Lexical Meaning

- How do we know what a word means?
- The overwhelming majority of **words** have an **arbitrary** relation between form and meaning. What does this mean?

cat

mao

neko

tako:s

kucing

house

fangzi

le

kanónhsa

rumah

English - Chinese - Japanese - Kanien'kéha - Bahasa Indonesia

- Are there any words that are **not** arbitrary?
- Kinda: onomatopoeia, sound symbolism



Compositional Meaning

- Word-meaning is arbitrary in the vast majority of cases. But what about phrases and sentences?
- How do you know what this phrase means?

“The beautiful cat”

“I see a chair in the room.”

“Coffee does not taste like grape juice.”

- Meaning is also **compositional**, constructed by bringing together the meanings of the words in a way informed by their syntactic arrangement.
- Are all phrases compositional?

kick the bucket

God bless you

pins and needles

Sense and Reference

- What's the difference between sense and reference?
- *Sense* refers to the context-independent parts of a word's meaning. Its definition, or the image it conjures in your mind.
- What is *reference*?

“By virtue of knowing the sense of some **expression**, you also know its relationship to the world, or its reference. If you have a mental representation of what cats are (four-legged, usually furry, potentially allergy-causing felines, etc.) that is associated with the expression *cat*, you will also be able to pick out those things in the world that are indeed cats.” (247)

“**expression**” is a term that includes words and phrases

- We should be able to identify the sense and referents (things referred to) of a given expression. Sometimes, this can be tricky.

person

* *person*, in and of itself, refers to a set of all people in existence. But in certain contexts, like this photo, it can refer to certain people. This is how words work.



bracelet



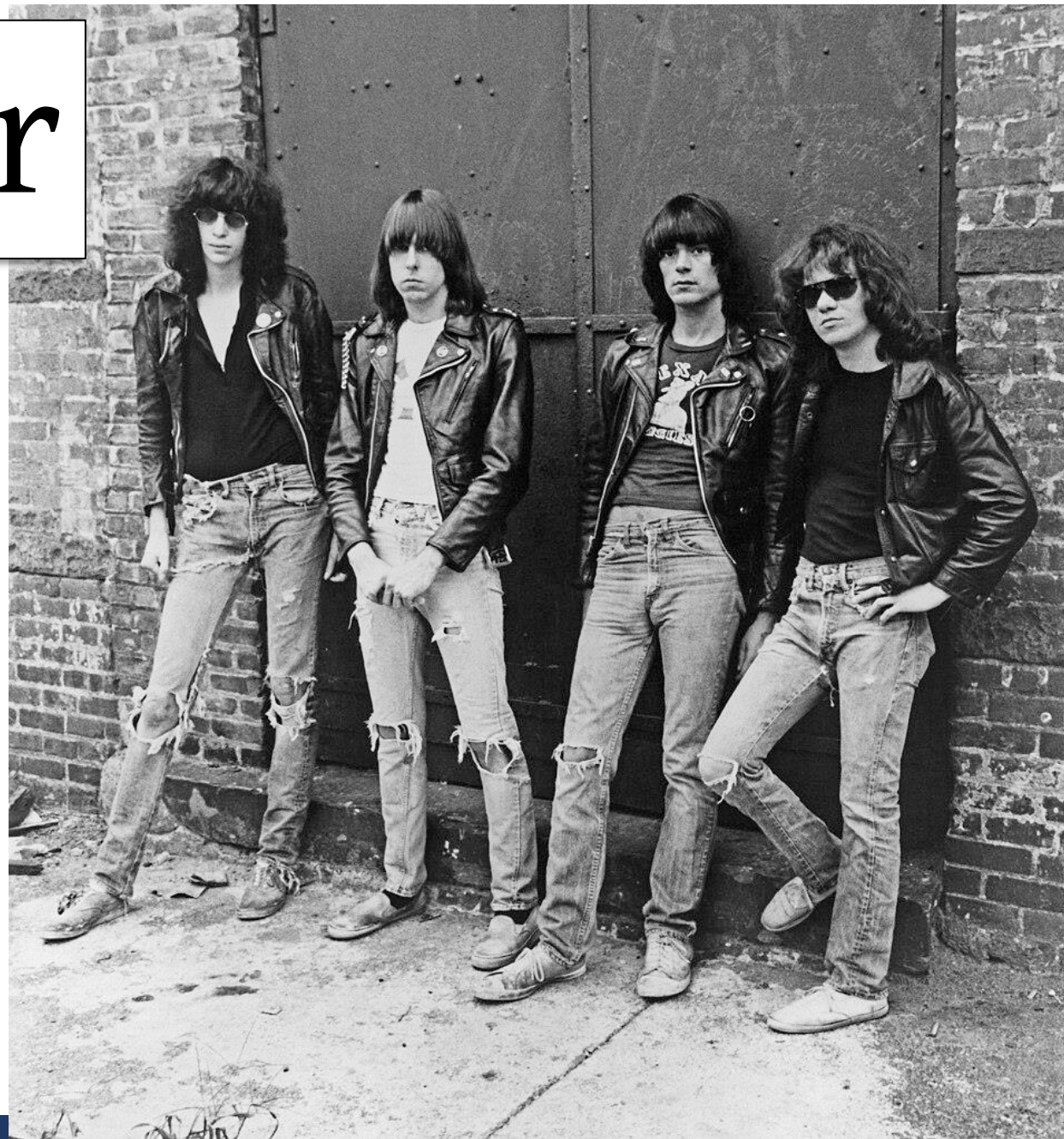
diamond



drummer



drummer



unicorn

[photo not found]

Reference is contextual. “Unicorn” can refer to something in a fictional context, but we say that it “has no reference” in the context of the real world. There are no actual unicorns. I’m sorry.



the King of the UK



the King of Canada



the King of the USA

[not applicable]

Sense and Reference

- We must know the sense of an expression to know its referents.
- But sometimes knowing the sense isn't enough to identify the referents (like the diamond, or who the drummer in the Ramones was).
- Expressions can have sense but no reference, like *unicorn* and “the King of the USA.”
- Different expressions with different senses often share the same referent, like how King Charles is both the “King of Canada” and the “King of the UK” (and Australia, New Zealand, etc.)
- What about proper nouns, i.e. names? Do they have sense? Reference?

Do Activity 1 on your sheets now.

Now do 2.

Sense Relations

- We can't do all of the ones covered in this week's reading.
- The big three will be **hyponymy**, **synonymy**, and **antonymy**.

Hyponymy

- What are hyponyms and hypernyms?

“We say that a word X is a hyponym of a word Y if the set that is the reference of X is always included in the set that is the reference of Y. When some set X is included in a set Y, we also say that X is a sub-set of Y.” (p.253)

- What are the hyponyms and hypernyms in these sentences?

Seabiscuit was a stallion.

Seabiscuit was a horse.

Fred stole my bicycle.

Fred took my bicycle.

John assassinated the mayor.

John killed the mayor.

Arthur looks like a squirrel.

Arthur looks like a rodent.

The pot is made of copper.

The pot is made of metal.



Hyponymy

- If it's natural to say “An X is a kind of Y,” there is a hyponymous relationship between X and Y.



“A squirrel is a kind of rodent.”

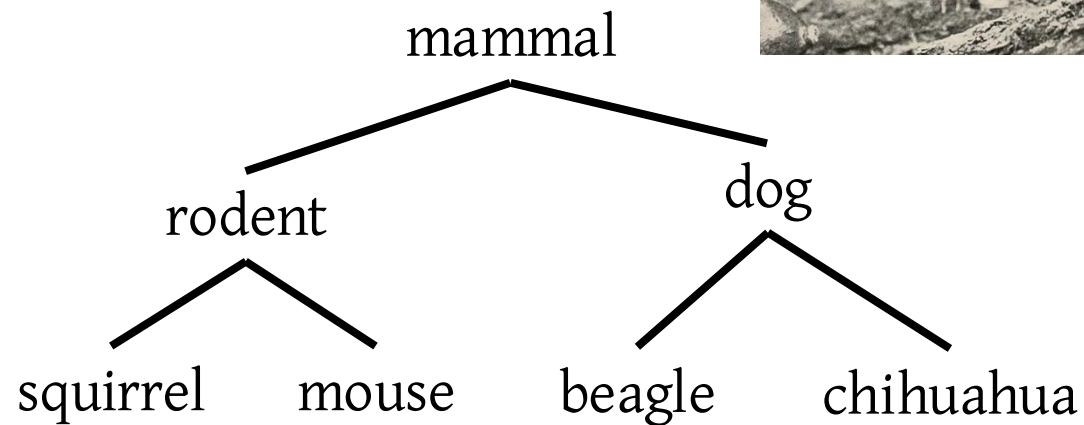
“A beagle is a kind of dog.”

“A rodent is a kind of mammal.”

“A dog is a kind of mammal.”

“A mouse is a kind of rodent.”

“A chihuahua is a kind of dog.”



mouse and *squirrel* are “sister terms”

What other sister terms are in this tree?

Synonyms

- What are synonyms?

“Two words are synonymous if they have exactly the same reference.” (p.254)

- They **do not** need to have the same sense.
- The expressions you produced in exercise 2 are synonymous phrases.
- It can be surprisingly hard to find words that are **exactly** synonymous. What do you think of these pairs?

couch and sofa

smart and intelligent

child and kid

house and home

guy and man

quick and rapid

groundhog and woodchuck

Antonyms

- What are antonyms?

“The basic notion of antonymy is of being ‘opposite’ in some sense. In order for two words to be antonyms of one another, they must have meanings that are related, yet these meanings must contrast with each other in some significant way.” (p.254)

- What does ‘opposite’ mean?
- Opposites are two sides of the same coin, so to speak.
- There are many different kinds of antonyms.
- We can’t cover all of them tonight, but most important to know are **complementary antonyms** and **gradable antonyms**.



Complementary Antonyms

- What are simple antonyms/complementary pairs?

“Two words X and Y are complementary antonyms if there is nothing in the world that is a part of both X’s reference and Y’s reference.” (p.255)

- No middle ground between them; they are binary.
- The referent must be either one or the other; it cannot be both, and it cannot be neither.

“The light is on.”

“The light is off.”

“The door is open.”

“The door is shut.”

“The man is alive.”

“The man is dead.”

Gradable Antonyms

- What are gradable antonyms?

“Gradable antonyms typically represent points on a continuum, so while something can be one or the other but not both, it can also easily be between the two (in contrast to complementary pairs), so saying ‘not X’ does not imply ‘and therefore Y.’” (p.255)

- There are usually intermediate terms. What are some intermediate terms between *hot* and *cold*?
- Comparative terms (*colder*, *hotter*) are normal, but they’d be weird for simple antonyms (*more off*, *more on*).
- One member of the pair is seen as primary.



“How old are you?”

“How young are you?”

“How tall are you?”

“How short are you?”

For next time:

- Read *Language Files* pp.154–170. There will be a quiz on this reading at the start of class.