Document pour la semaine 2.

Chapitre 2 du manuel *Understanding Semantics* (Löbner, Sebastien, publié en 2002, par Arnold Publishers, London). Les notes apparaissent à la fin du chapitre.

Quelques points de terminologie, concernant certaines conventions introduites dans le premier chapitre.

> *meaning*$_e$ (avec un indice *e*) veux dire *meaning of expression*.
>
> *CoU* veux dire *Context of Utterance*. En français, on dirait le contexte d'énonciation. Ce sont les circonstances sous lesquelles la phrase est énoncée.

Descriptive, social and expressive meaning 2

This chapter will try to convey a more precise idea about expression meaning. In the first part about 'descriptive' meaning, we will consider the relationship between meaning, reference and truth. The second part is concerned with non-descriptive meaning, i.e. parts of the meaning that are relevant on the level of social interaction or for the expression of subjective attitudes and evaluations.

2.1 Meanings are concepts

In order to understand what kind of entities meanings$_e$ are, the best thing we can do is consider the role that meanings play in actual communication. We will consider another concrete example and assume a CoU that takes up scenario 1 from 1.1.2: Mary, just back from her trip, finds her daughter Sheila quite upset. Sheila has spent the time with Mary's dog Ken, and the two do not like each other. When asked what happened, Sheila answers:

(1) *The dog has ruined my blue skirt.*

Let us suppose that what Sheila says is true and that Mary believes what Sheila says. Mary will then know something she did not know before: that Ken has ruined Sheila's blue skirt. She knows this because Sheila said (1) and because this sentence has the meaning it has. Let us take a closer look at how the transfer of information by such a sentence works, first for a single word and then for the whole sentence.

2.1.1 The meaning of a word

We assume that Sheila is referring to Ken. What enables Mary to recognize that? Sheila used the words *the dog*: the definite article *the* and the noun *dog*.

Both play an important role. The main information is conveyed by the noun. It specifies the referent as an entity of a certain kind, namely a dog. What entitles us to say so? It is the fact that the word *dog* means what it means. When you were asked to explain what the word *dog* means, you would probably say that dogs are a certain kind of medium-sized animals with four legs and a tail, that they are often kept as pets, that they bark, that they may bite, etc. In other words, you will most likely give a description of dogs. This is an adequate reaction: giving a description of dogs may well count as an explanation of the meaning of *dog*. At least roughly, the meaning of such words may safely be regarded as a description of the kind of thing the word can be used for.

Now, a very important point to realize is this: the word does not carry this description with it. This can be seen from the trivial fact that words which we do not know do not have any meaning to us. What a word in fact carries with it when it is spoken and heard is its sound *form* (or its spelling, if it is written). When Sheila says the word *dog*, she produces a certain sound pattern. And when Mary hears the word, she recognizes this pattern. The recognition, in turn, is only possible if the sound pattern is stored in Mary's mind as part of her linguistic knowledge.

The meaning of the word *dog*, i.e. the description of dogs, must also be something residing in Mary's mind. It must be information directly linked to the sound pattern of the word. The meaning is therefore a *mental* description. For mental descriptions in general, the term **concept** will be used. A concept for a kind, or **category**,[1] of entities is information in the mind that allows us to discriminate entities of that kind from entities of other kinds. A concept should not be equated with a visual image. Many categories we have words for, like *mistake, thought, noise, structure, mood* are not categories of visible things. But even for categories of visible things such as dogs, the mental description is by no means exhausted by a specification of their visual appearance. The dog concept, for example, also specifies the behaviour of dogs and how dogs may matter for us (as pets, watch dogs, guide-dogs, dangerous animals that may attack us, etc.).

We can now give a partial answer to the question of how Mary is able to recognize that Sheila is referring to Ken: Sheila acoustically produces the word *dog*; Mary recognizes the sound pattern; in her mind the pattern is linked to the meaning of the word *dog*, the concept ›dog‹[2]; the concept is a mental description of a potential referent. So due to the use of the word *dog*, Mary knows what *kind* of entity Sheila is referring to.

That Mary has the concept ›dog‹ linked to the sound pattern of *dog* in her mind is, of course, only part of the story. Sheila must have the same concept in her mind linked to the same sound pattern. More generally, a word can only be considered established if its form and meaning are linked in the minds of a great number of language users.

Still, we have not explained how Mary is led to assume that Sheila refers to this particular dog. The crucial clue to an explanation is the definite

article *the*. Had Sheila used the indefinite article *a* instead, Mary would not have concluded that Sheila was referring to Ken. What is the meaning of the definite article? It does not provide a direct cue to Ken, but it signals that the description supplied by the following noun applies to an entity in the given CoU which the addressees are supposed to be able to sort out. Therefore the article will cause Mary to ask herself which entity in the given CoU fulfils these conditions.

This is how far the meanings$_e$ of the words *the dog* take us in reconstructing the communication between Sheila and Mary with respect to the reference to this dog Ken. For the conclusion that it is Ken which Sheila is referring to, Mary needs extra-linguistic context information. The fact that Sheila is using the definite article restricts the choice of candidate dogs to those Mary and Sheila both know. A further restriction is provided by what Sheila says about the dog: that it has ruined her blue skirt. In the given CoU this may then suffice to exclude all dogs but Ken.

2.1.2 The meaning of a sentence

In her mind, Mary has the forms and meanings of all words in (1) at her disposal. She also knows the grammatical meanings of the singular form, of the positive form of the adjective and of the indicative present perfect form of the verb (recall 1.2.1). Applying all this and her knowledge of grammar to the linguistic input, she will be able to compose the meaning$_e$ of the whole sentence (1.2). The result is one complex concept which combines all the elements of the sentence. Let us call this a concept for a kind of **situation**. The main component of the situation concept is the concept ›ruin‹ contributed by the verb. It is of central importance because it connects all other elements.[3] As a concept for an event of the kind 'x ruins y' it involves three elements: the event itself, the ruiner x and the ruined object y. In the total situation concept, the event is described as one of ruining, the ruiner is described as a dog that is identifiable in the given CoU, the ruined object is described as a skirt, a blue one, linked to the speaker (recall 1.1.1 for the meaning of possessive pronouns like *my* and *your*); the present perfect tense contributes the specification that the situation at the time of utterance results from a previous event of the kind indicated. Thus the meaning of the sentence as a whole is a concept for a specific kind of situation. It can roughly be described as shown in the definition below. The description does not contain an explanation of the word meanings, but it makes explicit the contribution of the functional elements (1.1.1).

> ›the situation at the time of utterance results from a previous event in which a dog that can be uniquely determined in the CoU ruined a blue skirt which can be determined by its being linked to the speaker.‹

What was said about the meanings of words and sentences can be summed up as follows:

- The **meaning of a word**, more precisely a content word (noun, verb, adjective), is a concept that provides a mental description of a certain kind of entity.
- The **meaning of a sentence** is a concept that provides a mental description of a certain kind of situation.

2.2 Descriptive meaning

In the previous section it was established that meanings$_e$ are concepts. Actually the discussion here and in Chapter 1 was confined to only a certain part of meaning, namely, that part which bears on reference and truth. It is called **descriptive meaning** or *propositional meaning*. We will elaborate on descriptive meaning now, making more explicit how it is related to reference and truth. Non-descriptive meaning will be turned to in the second half of the chapter.

2.2.1 Descriptive meaning and reference

Reference and the descriptive meaning of words

When dealing with reference, the first thing to be observed is that, strictly speaking, it is usually not simply words that have referents. If the sentence in (1) is true, it involves reference to five things: the dog (an object, in the widest sense), the speaker's blue skirt (another object), the speaker herself, the ruining of the skirt (an event) and the time of utterance (a time). Table 2.1 shows to which elements of the sentence the five referents belong. The subject NP and the object NP each have a referent, the possessive pronoun within the object NP has a referent of its own. The finite verb contributes reference to a certain kind of event and, due to its tense, to a certain time. The adjective *blue* has no referent of its own, but it contributes to the description of the referent of the NP *my blue skirt*. The example shows that the referring elements of the sentence can be phrases (e.g. NPs), words (the verb) or grammatical forms (tense).

Type	Referent	Referring element
object	the dog	NP *the dog*
object	the speaker's blue skirt	NP *my blue skirt*
object	the speaker	poss. pronoun *my*
event	ruining	verb *ruin*
time	utterance time	tense *has* ___*ed*

Table 2.1 Five referents of sentence (1)

All this notwithstanding, it makes sense to talk of the **potential referents** of content words. Since the referent of an NP is essentially described by the noun, we may loosely speak of it as the 'referent of the noun'. Analogously, we can talk of the 'referent of a verb'. Adjectives never have a referent of their own, but they always describe the referent of some NP (see 6.4 for details). Thus, still more loosely speaking, we may extend the notion of referent to adjectives, keeping in mind that their 'referents' are borrowed, as it were. If the notion of potential referent is extended to all content words, descriptive meaning can be defined in a way that relates it directly to reference:

DEFINITION
The **descriptive meaning of a content word** is a concept for its potential referents.

When a sentence is used in a particular CoU, the addressees will try to fix concrete referents that match the descriptions. However, and this is a very important point, it may be impossible to fix referents, if the sentence is not true. Consider the sentence in (2):

(2) *There is a letter for you.*

Let us assume that Sheila says so to her mother, but that she is not telling the truth: there is no letter for Mary. There may be a letter, but not for Mary, or no letter at all. In any event, if the sentence is not true, the NP *a letter for you* lacks a referent. Usually, the finite verb of the sentence has a concrete event referent only if the sentence is true. For example, if (1) is false in some CoU, then the dog has not ruined the speaker's blue skirt and hence the verb *ruin*, in that CoU, fails to have a referent.

The descriptive meaning of sentences: propositions

There is no generally accepted notion for what a sentence as a whole refers to in a given CoU. For lack of a better term it will be called the **situation referred to**. It can be defined as the set of the referents of all referring elements of the sentence and how they are linked. For the sentence in (1), the situation referred to in the given CoU involved the five referents listed in Table 2.1.

The notion of the situation referred to only makes sense if the sentence is true: as we have seen, some elements of the sentence may lack a referent if it is not true. Thus, only in the case where a sentence is true in a particular CoU, does it properly refer to a situation of the kind it describes. Therefore, whenever the term *situation referred to* is used, it will be assumed that the sentence is true.

By analogy with the notion of potential referents we can talk of the *situations potentially referred to*. These are all those situations that fit the mental description provided by the meaning of the sentence, i.e. all the situations for

which the sentence is true. The descriptive meaning of a sentence can now be defined as shown in the definition below. In accordance with common terminology, the descriptive meaning of a sentence is called its 'proposition'. Alternatively, the proposition of a sentence will be referred to as the 'situation expressed', or the 'situation described':

DEFINITION
The **descriptive meaning of a sentence**, its **proposition**, is a concept that provides a mental description of the kind of situations it potentially refers to.

As we have seen, it is not only content words that shape the descriptive meaning of the sentence. Functional elements such as pronouns and articles or tense, a grammatical form, contribute to the proposition as well (recall the description of the meaning of (1) given on p. 21). Making use of the definition above, we can give the following general definition:

DEFINITION
The **descriptive meaning of a word or a grammatical form** is its contribution to descriptive sentence meaning.

Expression (type)	**Descriptive meaning** (*definitions adopted from *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*)	**Referent type**
skirt (noun)	›a woman's outer garment fastened around the waist and hanging down around the legs‹*	object
eat (verb)	›put (food) into the mouth and chew and swallow it‹*	event
blue (adjective)	›of a colour intermediate between green and violet, as of the sky or sea on a sunny day‹*	object [borrowed]
the [noun] (article)	the referent of the noun is uniquely determined in the given CoU	—
I (pronoun)	the referent is the speaker	object
The dog has ruined my blue skirt. (sentence)	see p. 21	situation

Table 2.2 Descriptive meaning

To sum up, the descriptive meaning of a sentence is a concept for a certain kind of situation. If the sentence is true in a CoU, such a situation actually exists and can be considered the referent of the sentence. The situation referred to contains the referents of all referring elements of the sentence. Table 2.2 gives a survey of different types of potentially referring expressions, their respective descriptive meanings and types of referents.

2.2.2 Denotations and truth conditions

Denotations

The descriptive meaning of a content word is a concept for its potential referents. As such it determines, or mentally describes, a category of entities. The meaning of *dog* is a concept that determines the category DOG[4] of all dogs, the concept ›ruin‹ determines the category RUIN of all events of ruining. The category determined by the meaning of a content word is called its 'denotation'; a word is said to 'denote' this category:

DEFINITION
The **denotation** of a content word is the category, or set, of all its potential referents.

The denotation of a word is more than the set of all *existing* entities of that kind. It includes real referents as well as fictitious ones, usual exemplars and unusual ones, maybe even exemplars we cannot imagine because they are yet to be invented.[5]

The relationship between a word, its meaning and its denotation is often depicted in the **semiotic triangle**, a convenient schema which will be used in this volume in a variety of forms. Figure 2.1 gives the semiotic triangle for the descriptive meaning of content words. The arrow that connects the word with its denotation is drawn with a broken line. This is to indicate that a word is not directly linked to its denotation, but only indirectly via its descriptive meaning.

Truth conditions

There is no established term for what would be the denotation of a sentence. By analogy with the denotation of a content word it would be the

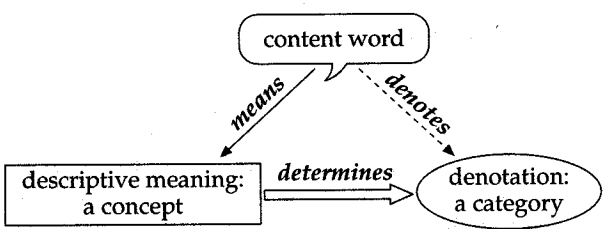

Figure 2.1 The semiotic triangle for content words

set, or category, of all situations to which the sentence can potentially refer, i.e. the category of all situations in which the sentence is true. There is, however, another notion that is quite common and directly related to the would-be denotation of a sentence: its so-called truth conditions:

DEFINITION
The **truth conditions** of a sentence are the conditions under which it is true.

If we know the truth conditions of a sentence, then we know which situations the sentence can refer to, i.e. the 'denotation' of the sentence. Conversely, if we know which situations a sentence can refer to, we know its truth conditions. Thus the notion of truth conditions can be considered the practical equivalent of the notion of the denotation of a sentence.

By analogy with Figure 2.1, the connection between a sentence, its proposition and its truth conditions can be put as follows: the descriptive meaning of the sentence is its proposition, and the proposition determines the truth conditions of the sentence. The resulting picture is given in Figure 2.2, another variant of the semiotic triangle.

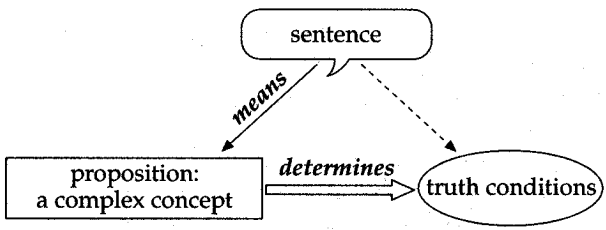

Figure 2.2 The semiotic triangle for sentences

2.2.3 Proposition and sentence type

So far in this discussion of sentence meaning one aspect has been neglected: the grammatical type of the sentence also contributes to its meaning, and this contribution is non-descriptive. Compare, for example, sentence (1) to its interrogative counterpart (3):

(1) *The dog has ruined my blue skirt.*
(3) *Has the dog ruined my blue skirt?*

The question describes exactly the same sort of situation. Hence it is considered to have the same proposition as (1). Yet the total meaning of (3) is, of course, different from the meaning of (1): (3) renders a question while (1) renders an assertion. The difference in meaning is due to the grammatical forms of the sentences or, technically speaking, to differences in

grammatical **sentence type**. (1) is a so-called declarative sentence. Declarative sentences in English have a certain word order: the finite verb is in the second position of the sentence, usually after the subject. (3) is an interrogative sentence of the yes–no question type: the finite verb is in the initial position and has to be an auxiliary verb.

The semantic contribution of the grammatical sentence type is not part of the proposition. For declarative sentences it consists in presenting the situation expressed as actually pertaining. This sentence type is therefore used for making assertions, communicating information, etc. The interrogative sentence type, by contrast, leaves open whether or not the situation pertains. It is therefore the standard option to be chosen for asking questions.

The meaning contribution of grammatical sentence type is a first example of non-descriptive meaning. We will now consider two more types: social meaning and expressive meaning. The meaning of sentence type belongs to neither of them.

2.3 Meaning and social interaction: social meaning

Talking to others is social interaction, i.e. an activity exerted in co-ordination with others. Any verbal utterance will receive an interpretation as a communicative act (1.1.3) in the current social network, and in this sense it always has a *social function*. Language as such can be said to serve first and foremost social functions. (This does not contradict the view that language is primarily a means of communication: communication, in particular the communication of information, *is* of course a very important type of social interaction.)

2.3.1 Expressions with social meaning

The term **social meaning** does not refer to this general aspect of verbal interaction, and is thereby not to be confused with the communicative meaning of a verbal act. Rather, social meaning is on a par with descriptive meaning: it is part of the lexical meaning of certain words, phrases or grammatical forms. If an expression has social meaning, it has so independently of the particular CoU. Like descriptive meaning, social meaning is an invariable part of the expression meaning. Most expressions and grammatical forms do not have social meaning, but some do. Let us consider an example. Sheila is on the train in Germany and is addressed by the ticket inspector:

(4) a. *Ihre Fahrkarte, bitte! – Danke.* (German)
b. *Deine Fahrkarte, bitte! – Danke.* (German)
c. 'Your ticket, please! – Thank you.'

(4a) would be appropriate if Sheila is an adult and no acquaintance of the inspector. The third person plural form of the possessive pronoun, *Ihre*, literally 'Their' (the third person plural pronouns in this 'polite' use are written with a capital letter: *Sie* for *you*, *Ihr* for *your*), is required for the formal, or 'polite', style of speech used for addressing adults. (4b) contains the simple second person singular possessive pronoun *dein* and would be the proper, informal, form of address if Sheila were a child, a relative, or a close acquaintance of the ticket inspector. Otherwise, using (4b) would be considered rude. If the inspector addressed Sheila in English, (4c) would be adequate in all cases. But when speaking German, the inspector is forced to choose between the formal and the informal way of address (or to avoid the use of pronouns altogether). By the choice of the pronoun the speaker indicates his social relationship to the addressee(s).

The formal German pronoun *Sie*, when used as a term of address, has the same descriptive meaning as English *you*: it indicates reference to the addressee(s). But, in addition, it has a non-descriptive meaning which English *you* lacks. Correspondingly, the informal variants *du* (singular) and *ihr* (plural) have the same descriptive meaning as *Sie* (if one disregards the differentiation in number) but differ in social meaning. The distinction between the two kinds of relationship relevant for choosing either *Sie* or *du* in German is also relevant in other respects: it coincides with the use of surnames with title vs first names as vocative terms of address. For example the unmarked way of address and reference to the addressee would be (5a) or (5b), while the mixed variants in (5c) and (5d) are marked under normal circumstances:

(5) a. *Ist das Ihr Fahrrad, Herr Schmidt?* formal
b. *Ist das dein Fahrrad, Helmut?* informal
c. ?? *Ist das Ihr Fahrrad, Helmut?* mixed
d. ?? *Ist das dein Fahrrad, Herr Schmidt?* mixed
'Is that your bicycle Mr Schmidt/Helmut?'

(4a) and (4b) above contain two further expressions with social meaning: *bitte* ›please‹ and *danke* ›thank you‹. Unlike the German terms of address, these two expressions have exclusively social meaning, they are the first expressions we encounter which lack descriptive meaning altogether. (English *thank you*, containing *you*, might be considered as referring to the addressee(s). To this extent it also has descriptive meaning.) The sentences in (4) are elliptical: they lack anything but the direct object and could be spelt out as *geben Sie mir Ihre Fahrkarte, bitte* (lit. ›give you me your ticket, please‹). At least they will be interpreted in this sense and can thus be considered defective imperative sentences with the proposition ›addressee gives speaker addressee's ticket‹. The addition of *bitte* does not change the proposition. Rather, it marks the request as modestly polite. *Bitte*, in this use, is a mere formality marker, indicating, similar to the

forms of address, a certain kind of social relationship between speaker and addressee(s).

Danke ›thank you‹ has no descriptive meaning either. It just serves as a slightly formal response that counts as an acknowledgement of a favour or service. Given different social rules, the ticket inspector might have bowed instead of saying anything. Since the utterance lacks a proposition, the question of truth does not arise. If someone says 'Danke' or 'Thank you', he automatically has thanked, regardless of whether or not he is actually thankful. He is observing the appropriate social rule simply by producing those conventionally prescribed words.

All languages have set phrases with a clear-cut social meaning, and no other: phrases of greeting (*Hi*) or saying goodbye, phrases of apologizing (*sorry*), acknowledging (*thank you*) or answering the phone. For each such phrase in each language, there is a social rule that defines the circumstances under which it is properly used and what it means. This is, in general, the defining criterion of expressions with social meaning: an expression or grammatical form has social meaning if and only if its use is governed by the social rules of conduct or, more generally, rules for handling social interactions. By contrast, the use of expressions with descriptive meaning is governed by rules of factual adequacy.

Expression (type)	**Social meaning**	**Descriptive meaning**
German *du* (pronoun of address)	informal relationship	the person addressed
German *Sie* (pronoun of address)	formal relationship	the person or persons addressed
English *you* (pronoun of address)	—	the person or persons addressed
Sheila (proper name as term of address)	informal relationship	the person called Sheila
Mr Murple (proper name as term of address)	formal relationship	the person called Mr Murple
please (adverb)	formal demand	—
Hi! (complete utterance)	informal greeting	—

Table 2.3 Social meaning

In 1.1, three levels of meaning were introduced. Expressions like *please* or *goodbye*, with exclusively social meaning, can be regarded as expressions with a lexically fixed communicative meaning (1.1.3). They constitute ready-made speech act devices. The social rules that govern their use are treated in Austin's speech act theory under the label 'felicity conditions' (i.e. conditions necessary for the speech act to actually come about; see Further Reading in Chapter 1 for references).

2.3.2 Social meaning in Japanese

In European and European-influenced societies, social differentiation of speech is only moderately reflected in the language system. Apart from set phrases, social meaning is essentially restricted to terms for reference to the addressee. Furthermore, the system of differentiation is usually restricted to two levels of formality, an informal and a more formal way of speaking. In other cultures, however, say those of Japan, Korea or non-socialist China, the differentiation of expressions pervades language to a much greater extent. In English or German, you do not find any formality markers in sentences which do not refer to the addressee. There would be no simple way of reformulating an utterance like *The dog ate the yellow socks* to express your relationship with the addressee along the lines relevant for the use of surname vs first name or the use of *Sie* vs *du* in German. (The only possibility would be to add a vocative to the sentence: *The dog ate the yellow socks, John/Mr Murple*). In Japanese, however, one would have to choose from among two or more levels of formality in any sentence whatsoever, because formality is obligatorily marked on the finite verb. In Japanese, the sentence *the dog ate the yellow socks* would correspond to either (6a) or (6b):

(6) a.	*inu*	*wa*	*kiiroi*	*sokkusu*	*o*	*tabe-**ta**.*
	dog	TOP	yellow	socks	ACC	eat	PT[6]
b.	*inu*	*wa*	*kiiroi*	*sokkusu*	*o*	*tabe-**mashi-ta**.*
	dog	TOP	yellow	socks	ACC	eat	FORM PT

The plain past tense form of the verb in (6a) represents the informal way of talking which is only appropriate in rather intimate relationships like those within a family, between lovers or good friends. Normal formal talking, which is the standard between people of the same status, is expressed by inserting a formality marker, here in the form *-mashi-*, between the stem of the verb and its tense ending (6b). The resulting form is called the *masu*-form. The marker *-mashi-* has no descriptive meaning.

In addition to marking the level of formality on the finite verb, Japanese has rich differentiation among pronouns, or pronoun-like expressions, for the addressee as well as for the speaker. Instead of the single first person singular pronoun *I* in English, a Japanese speaker has to choose from among plain omission (usual and neutral), *boku* or *ore* (informal, men only),

watashi (formal, standard), *watakushi* (very formal) and other, more special expressions. Furthermore, there are different nouns and verbs for things belonging to, or actions done by, oneself or others. Let us consider another example in order to get an idea of how the differentiation of formality works:

(7) a. *Uchi ni i-ru.*
b. *Uchi ni i-mas-u.*
c. *Uchi ni ori-mas-u.*
home IN be (present tense)

The sentences in (7) are typical colloquial Japanese sentences, lacking a subject term. The word *uchi* for someone's home is an informal term. The verb *iru* ›to be [temporarily]‹ is used in its plain, informal form in (7a). (7b) is more formal, replacing plain *iru* with its *masu*-form *imasu*. In addition to the grammatical form, the choice of the verb itself matters for social meaning. The verb *iru* as such has no social meaning attached to it. In (7c), however, it is replaced by the verb *oru* in its *masu*-form *orimasu*. *Oru* also means ›to be/come/go‹, but is ›humble‹: by using it, its subject is socially lowered. There is also a variant of ›to be/come/go‹ that raises its subject referent in social status, the verb *irassharu* with its *masu*-form *irasshaimasu*:

(7) d. *Otaku ni irasshai-mas-u.*

If, for the sake of simplicity, the meanings ›to go/to come‹ of *oru* and *irassharu* are disregarded, the four sentences in (7) all have the same descriptive meaning: ›[someone not specified] is at home‹. The term *uchi* for someone's home, is informal, while *otaku* is a formal term that marks the person whose home it is as superior. It is now interesting to see how the differences in social meaning restrict the use and interpretations of the sentences. The employment of terms with social meaning in Japanese is governed by two principles: (i) the addressee is never inferior, and (ii) the speaker is never superior. Given these principles, (7d), although it contains no subject, can only be used in the sense ›*you* are at home‹ and (7c) always amounts to ›*I* am at home‹. (7a) and (7b), however, can mean ›I/you/he/she/it/we/they are ... at home‹ since the verb is neutral with respect to the social status of the subject.

2.4 Meaning and subjectivity: expressive meaning

Anything we say will also be taken as the expression of a personal emotion, opinion or attitude. When you imagine Sheila saying *The dog has ruined my blue skirt*, you will probably have assumed a manner of speaking that displays anger, indignation or frustration. But the sentence *can* also be

spoken in a neutral manner or in a way that exhibits different emotions, for example desperation or concern, but also delight, amusement or relief. It could be pronounced in a mean or a kind manner. Or hastily, or particularly slowly. All these ways of shaping an utterance would serve the expression of Sheila's feelings and/or her attitudes towards the dog, or Mary, or the entire situation. But even if she chose a neutral way of speaking, Sheila would inevitably display certain traits of her personality, by choosing the term *ruin* for what the dog did to her skirt, by not calling the dog by its name, by reporting damage of her property to the dog owner, etc. In this sense, every utterance serves, consciously or not, the expression of personal feelings, evaluations and attitudes.

2.4.1 Expressive meaning

Again, this general aspect of language use, its *expressive function*, is not what is meant with the notion of **expressive meaning**. On a par with descriptive and social meaning, expressive meaning is part of the lexical meaning of certain expressions,[7] a semantic quality of words and phrases independent of the CoU and of the way they are being spoken. Let us call expressions with expressive meaning simply **expressives**. Again, there are two kinds of expressives, those with exclusively expressive meaning and others with both descriptive and expressive meaning. (For expressions with both social and expressive meaning, see 2.4.2.) We will first turn to the former.

The most typical instances of expressives with exclusively expressive meaning are words and phrases used for directly expressing an emotion, feeling or sensation, such as *ouch, wow, oh*. Such **interjections** are language-specific. Languages may differ in how many such expressions they have, and an expressive may have different meanings in different languages. Here are some interjections from Hungarian: *fuj* (disgust), *au* (sudden pain), *jaj* (sudden pain or fright), *jajaj* (sadness or concern), *hüha* (admiration, warning, fright), *hú* (admiration), *ejha* (astonishment). Other examples of expressives are exclamations of various sorts, such as English *Gosh!*, *Goddammit!*, *Jesus!*, *Oh my goodness!*, and so on.

At least some feelings, sensations, attitudes and evaluations can thus be expressed in two ways: subjectively and directly by means of expressives, and objectively by forming sentences with the respective descriptive meaning. The difference between, say, 'Ouch!' and 'That hurts!' is this: 'That hurts!' is a sentence with a regular descriptive meaning, consisting in the proposition that 'that hurts'; 'Ouch!' expresses sudden pain, as would a certain grimace. You can react to someone saying 'That hurts!' with 'Really?', 'That's too bad' or 'I don't believe that', which are replies relating to the proposition of the sentence. You cannot reply to 'Ouch!' in the same way because there is no proposition.

The rules governing the use of expressives are simple. Since all expressives serve to express personal feelings, attitudes or sensations, which are

perceptible only to the holder, their correct use is just a matter of personal judgement. For instance, saying *ugh!* is generally taken as an expression of disgust. In order to decide whether the use of this expression is correct in a given CoU, the speaker only has to make up her mind whether or not she wants the addressee(s) to believe that she finds something disgusting.

Interjections and exclamations can be used as complete utterances. Other expressives such as *hopefully*, *(un)fortunately* or *thank God* can be inserted into a sentence in order to add a personal attitude to the situation expressed. These additions do not contribute to the proposition, as the following examples may illustrate:

(8) a. *Hopefully Bob will arrive tonight. – Really?*
b. *I hope Bob will arrive tonight. – Really?*

The questioning reply 'Really?' is always directed at a proposition asserted before. In (8a), the remark can only be related to the proposition that Bob will arrive that night, not to the speaker's attitude expressed by *hopefully*. In (8b), however, the same attitude is *described* by the descriptive formulation *I hope* ... and is hence part of the proposition of the sentence. Therefore the reply 'Really?' can be used to question the speaker's claim that she *hopes* that Bob will arrive, i.e. her attitude described. Alternatively, the reply 'Really?' can be related to the embedded proposition that Bob will arrive that night, which is identical to the proposition of the sentence in (8a).

More drastic cases of expressives are **swear words** such as those occurring in the following passages from the film *Pulp Fiction*:[8]

(9) J: But me, my eyes are wide *fuckin'* open.
V: What *the fuck* does that mean?
J: That's it for me. From here on in, you can consider *my ass* retired.

(10) Any of you *fuckin' pricks* move and I'll execute every *motherfuckin'* last one of you.

The adverbial insert *the fuck* in (9) serves the expression of an emotion that is probably neither necessarily positive (like joy) nor negative (like indignation) but just strong: it adds an emotional charge to the whole utterance. Other expressives, like *bloody* or the highly productive *fucking* add the same kind of emphasis to single components of the proposition. None of these expressives make additions to the propositional content. However, in our examples two other expressions with expressive meaning do: *my ass* in (9) is an emotionally charged term for reference to the speaker. It must have descriptive meaning because it is an NP in object position. Its descriptive meaning is just >I<. Similarly, the expression *you fuckin' pricks* in (10) has the same descriptive meaning as the plain pronoun *you*, plus the specific expressive content of the rest of the phrase. The expression is not just

emotionally charged but clearly offensive when used with reference to others.

In English and presumably most other languages, there exist many emotionally charged terms for persons, such as *idiot, bastard, motherfucker* or *ass-hole* for the offensive part, or *darling, baby, honey* as terms of affection. They all have the same unspecific descriptive meaning: ›person‹. The phenomenon extends to expressions for men, women, children, body parts or other things of central importance in everyday life, such as certain animals, vehicles, housing, food, clothes, as well as to the most common activities: walking, talking, working, eating, drinking, sleeping or sexual activities. Most expressive terms add a negative attitude to the descriptive meaning, others are just emotional. Positive expressive meanings are rare. Many of these expressions have a neutral, purely descriptive, meaning variant besides the expressive one. For example, *paw* in its neutral meaning denotes the feet of certain animals. The expressive variant of the word means ›hand‹ (of a person) for its descriptive meaning part while its expressive meaning part is an unspecific emotional emphasis.

Type	Expression	Expressive meaning	Descriptive meaning
interjection	*ouch*	sudden pain	—
adjective	*stupid*	dislike, contempt	—
adverb	*fortunately*	preference	—
noun	*bastard*	dislike	›person‹
noun	*paw*	emotional emphasis	›hand‹ (of a person)
verb	*cram*	emotional emphasis	›eat‹

Table 2.4 Expressive meaning

2.4.2 Social versus expressive meaning

Many semanticists consider expressive meaning and social meaning not to be clearly separated. The distinction is, however, not as difficult as it might appear. The use of terms and forms with social meaning is governed by rules of social conduct. They define what kind of social circumstances make suitable occasions for using the expression and they define what its use is taken for: a greeting, an apology, a polite or intimate way of referring to other persons, etc. By contrast, the use of terms with expressive meaning is governed by different criteria which concern only the subjective adequacy of expressing one's personal feelings, attitudes, etc. Sure enough, there are rules of conduct constraining the expression of feelings or attitudes in certain social situations, and the use of expressive terms, in particular swear

Meaning part	Function	Criteria for correct use
descriptive meaning	*description of referents and situations*	agreement with facts
social meaning	*indication of social relations and performance of social acts*	social rules of conduct
expressive meaning	*immediate expression of personal sensations, feelings, attitudes or evaluations*	subjective choice

Table 2.5 Parts of meaning

words as terms of address, may have severe social consequences. But while there are clear social rules for the use of, say, the first name vs the surname plus title as terms of address, there is no such rule for addressing someone as an 'idiot' or 'motherfucker'.

Some expressions with predominantly social meaning can be considered a means of the socially ritualized expression of feelings and attitudes, e.g. terms of thanking, wishing well, congratulation, condolence or apologizing. Phrases such as *I'm sorry* or *nice to meet you*, which literally represent descriptions of attitudes, point in this direction. Still, these phrases are primarily social and not expressive. One's real subjective feelings are not, and cannot be, socially relevant. What counts is the actual expression of feelings and a behaviour consistent with having them.

2.5 Connotations

If an expression has descriptive meaning, any mention of it will activate not only the concept for its potential referents but together with it a host of further associations. Among the associations, some are conventional. They are called **connotations** and often considered to be something like a secondary meaning in addition to the primary lexical meaning. Connotations such as 'dirty' for pigs are neither part of the descriptive meaning of *pig* (clean pigs can perfectly be referred to as 'pigs') nor do they constitute expressive meaning (the word *pig* can be used in an expressively neutral way). Often the connotations of a word change, while its meaning remains the same. For example, the connotations of the word *computer* have changed considerably since the 1960s (when computers had the connotations of dangerous super-intelligent machines threatening to escape human control and take over), but the word still means the same. What has changed dramatically in the past 50 years is the actual denotation (recall note 5) of the word, and it is these changes which gave rise to the change of

connotations. It is therefore more appropriate to consider connotations to be connected not to the word itself (like meaning) but rather to the actual denotation.

While a distinction is drawn in this volume between a word's meaning and the connotations associated with its actual denotation, it should be mentioned that expressive meaning, e.g. the negative attitude expressed by derogative terms, is called connotation by other authors. Indeed, connotations play a role for the semantic motivation of swear words. For example, the conventional attribute of dirtiness is the basis of the use of *pig* or German *Schwein* as an offensive term for people. But the attitude expressed by the swear word is not part of that meaning (neither descriptive nor expressive) of *pig*, in which it denotes the animal category, nor is the conventional attitude towards pigs identical with the expressive meaning conveyed by the swear word.

Negative connotations, together with social taboos, are responsible for what are called **euphemisms**: roughly, good or indirect terms for bad or tabooed things. Political language is full of euphemisms (just take the vocabulary of warfare), as are the semantic fields of death (*pass away* for *die*) or sexuality (cf. terms like *intercourse, sleep with someone, make love,* etc.) Negative connotations are also at issue in matters of political correctness. Certain 'labels' like *homosexual* are considered discriminatory due to their connotations and sought to be replaced by connotatively neutral terms or terms used by the members of the social group themselves. But as long as the discrimination itself persists in society, the new expressions will soon take on the old connotations. Due to this inflationary process, we are observing a rapid succession of 'politically correct' expressions for certain social groups (such as *disabled* being replaced by *handicapped* being replaced by *challenged*).

Checklist

descriptive meaning
reference
referent
situation referred to
proposition
truth
denotation
truth conditions
sentence type
  declarative sentence
  interrogative sentence
social meaning
social interaction
rules of social conduct
formality
terms of address
phrases with social meaning
expressive meaning
subjectivity
expressives
interjections
swear words
connotations
euphemisms
political correctness
taboos

Exercises

1 Try to define the descriptive meaning of the following words and compare your definition to the definition given in a monolingual English dictionary, e.g. *Oxford English Dictionary*: *fish, milk, red, pregnant, follow.*
2 What are the appropriate terms in English for (i) asking somebody to repeat something you did not understand; (ii) accepting an apology; (iii) answering the phone; (iv) New Year's greetings? What kind of meaning do these expressions have?
3 Try to find three interjections other than *ouch* and *ugh* and determine what they express.
4 Try to find expressives with the descriptive meaning ›mouth‹, ›car‹, ›child‹, ›walk‹, ›work‹.
5 Try to find five examples of modern euphemisms.
6 Try to determine the presently politically correct terms for people who are politically incorrectly called 'blind', 'black' or 'fat'.
7 Discuss the role of words in communication.
8 Discuss the connection between descriptive meaning, reference and truth.
9 Most sentences of a natural language like English can be used in different CoUs to communicate different information, although their meaning remains the same. How is that possible?
10 Try to determine word by word the descriptive, social and/or expressive meaning of the expressions in the following dialogue:

A: *Hi, Velma. Are you going to that stupid lecture?*
B: *Well, yes. I'm sorry, Sweety.*

11 Discuss the relationship between expression meaning and connotations for words such as *pig*.

Further reading

Lyons (1977, Chapter 7) on reference, sense (his term for *meaning*) and denotation. Lyons (1995, Chapter 6.6–6.8, 7) on sentence type. Palmer (2001) for a comprehensive account of non-descriptive sentence meaning. Brown and Gilman (1960) for a classical study about pronouns of address. Brown and Levinson (1978) for a general account of social meaning. Suzuki (1978, Chapter 5) for a comparison of forms of address and self-reference in Japanese and English. Lyons (1995, Chapter 2.3), Cruse (1986, Chapter 12.2) for expressive vs descriptive meaning. Andersson and Trudgill (1990) and Hughes (1992) for comprehensive studies of swear words in English.

Notes

1 In Chapter 9 on cognitive semantics the notions *concept* and *category* will be treated in more depth and detail. For the present purposes you may take a category as a set of entities of the same kind.

2 This type of quotation mark will be used for concepts, and for meanings in general: ⟩x-y-z⟨ is the concept that constitutes the meaning of the expression x-y-z.

3 See Chapter 6 on predication.

4 SMALL CAPITALS are used for categories.

5 Yet the totality of existing exemplars of a category certainly is representative of the category and primarily shapes our concept for this kind of thing. We will occasionally use the term *actual denotation* for the subset of the denotation that is formed by its real existing members. The relationship between denotation and actual denotation will be discussed in 9.6.

6 TOP = topic marker ('as for . . .'), ACC = accusative case marker, FORM = formality marker, PT = past tense ending. In Japanese, particles follow the NP; there are no articles.

7 Be careful not to confuse the terms *expression meaning* and *expressive meaning*. Expression meaning is a general term for the meaning$_e$ of words, phrases, and sentences, since all these are expressions. Expressive meaning is a part of expression meaning, alongside with descriptive meaning and social meaning.

8 Quentin Tarantino, *Pulp Fiction* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 140 and 13, respectively.