Lexicon and meaning II

Cognitive approaches to meaning

Cognitive approaches

- Relation between language and mind
- Based upon human perception and conceptualisation of the world
- Language as an instrument for organising, processing and conveying information
- Cognitive linguists: Lakoff, Langacker
- Recent approach (anthropological linguistics)

- Language is embedded in the overall cognitive capacities of the human being
- Formal structure of language are not(!) autonomous but reflections of
  - General conceptual organisation
  - Perception
  - Processing mechanisms
  - Experiential and environmental influences
- Primacy of semantics in linguistic analysis

Cognitive Semantics

- Humans, not words create meaning
- Borders of meaning: blurred and fuzzy
  Bird [+animate, -human, +wings?, +lays eggs, +can fly?, feathers?]
→ Concept of prototypes (for studying the internal structure of categories)
→ Student's presentation

Universalism vs. Relativism

- Relativism: colour perception determined by culturally specific language associations and perceptual learning
- Universalism: colour naming and categorisation = coherent within and across cultures

Berlin & Kay (1969)
Basic colour terms

- Berlin & Kay: discovered existence of central denotational areas of colour categories → colour focus
  
  > Area considered the most typical (cf. Prototype)

- Similarities in categorical colour perception across culture → universalism (Rosch)

Berlin and Kay

- Conclusion of cross-linguistic study:
  - Different languages encode a differing number of BCTs
  - Universal inventory of 11 BCC from which colour terms can be created → colour focus coincided with surprising precision
  - Strict limitations on which BCTs may be encoded → evolutionary sequence

Evolutionary sequence of bct

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages:</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III a</th>
<th>III b</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foci</td>
<td>white</td>
<td>black</td>
<td>red</td>
<td>yellow</td>
<td>purple</td>
<td>pink</td>
<td>orange</td>
<td>grey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frames and Schemes

- Human conceptual system does not consist of isolated concepts
- Concepts are organised into larger, internally structured entities
- These entities comprise human beliefs, actions, experiences…
- Linguistic means available to refer to (aspects of) the scene

Example: Frame

- Example: HOUSE
- Subframe of: building
  - Is part of: village, city, suburb
  - Material: wood, stone, concrete
- # of window: culturally determined?
- # of door: culturally determined?
Example: Scheme (Scene)

- Scene: Commercial transaction
  - Involves buying and selling of goods
- Linguistic means:
  - Verbs: buy, sell, pay…
  - Nouns: price, cost, money…
  - Grammatical constructions: buyer identified by a to-phrase with the verb sell but identified as a subject with the verb buy…

Group work

- Birthday party
- Travelling