1. Introduction
Lexical semantics is the study of word meanings and their relationships

1.1 What specifies word meaning?
→ division between knowledge about word meanings (lexical-semantic knowledge) and world knowledge (“folk”-semantic knowledge)

∃ parts of knowledge that
- include information about grammatical use of this word
- regulate interaction with syntax

→ some features depend on regular sense extension properties (count/mass, plural…)

1.2 Is semantic structure “rich”? no → formal semantics, propositional logic yes → no finite lists (e.g. features) exist

2. Semantic reference and some problems
“Folk” theory: referential theory of meaning
linguistic expression stands for things in the world for which words are “labels”

(1) a. *are green we boxes ship the
b. the

→ novel sentences are understood through the words in it and the way they are connected
- some strings are more meaningful than others
- have parts that are themselves meaningful
- mean something in particular
- competent speakers handle it effortlessly
- meaning of the clause is composed of meanings of the phrases/words

2.1 Objection 1: not every word denotes actual object
(2) Pegasus; nobody; Ralph is fat (examples by Lycan, 1998)

fat = abstract quality (property, feature, attribute)
is = abstract relation
- some nouns do not refer to abstract /individual things like sake, behalf (Quine)
- some words do not refer to things at all (hey, and, the)

2.2 Objection 2: meaning involves more than reference
(3) a. the pope; Benedict XVI; Ratzinger
b. Ratzinger’s car sold on ebay / *Ratzinger to read mass in St. Peter
c. *the pope’s car sold on ebay / the pope to read mass in St. Peter

→ same referent - different meaning

Identity problem:

3. Lexical semantics and inference
inferences play a role in determining lexical semantic structure
→ regularities in the interaction between syntax and word meaning from semantic features of the word
→ needed therefore: a lexical semantic representation

(4) a. John met Sue on/*in Tuesday
b. John met Sue in/*on the morning
c. John met Sue in/*on March
d. John met Sue (*in/*on) last night
e. John met Sue at/*on ten o’clock.

→ no explanation to the fact that intervals of time corresponding to days are selected by a different preposition from other such intervals (on vs. in)
- days and months are typed differently in language even though they base on the same world knowledge ontology (Verspoor, 1997)

→ choice of preposition is a linguistic convention

4. Productivity
- productive rule can be blocked by presence of a lexeme with the same meaning
- cf. use of cow for the meat of a cow is blocked by independent existence of the word beef in the lexicon

(5) a. *We had cow for dinner
b. We had beef for dinner

→ occurs in isolation of world knowledge
- depends only on lexical information and not on concepts associated with the denotation of a word
→ therefore: further need for lexical semantic representation

4. Conceptual semantics
representation of lexical semantic structure via conceptual structures
- entities reflect human world knowledge
- alternations in the linguistic context in which particular words (mainly verbs and prepositions) can be used, to identify generalizations over relations between alternate uses of lexical items.
→ components of the lexical representation: are assigned a consistent semantics, can be combined in constrained ways
- in lexical semantics: some form of lexical decomposition is necessary to capture generalizations about the relationship between syntactic form and intended meaning
- well accepted that it is impossible to decompose meaning into necessary and sufficient conditions for identification of the entities words

Reading assignment for 16/10/2007: