Access Semantics and meaning construction

1 Polysemy and lexical concepts

Consider the following examples, which all make use of the referential vehicle: `declare`.

(1) He decided to declare his undying love for her.
(2) He told the customs officer he had nothing to declare.
(3) The Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, was obliged to declare war on Germany following the Nazi invasion of Poland.

a. According to Access Semantics, each of these instances of `declare` would constitute distinct lexical concepts, that are semantically related, and hence they exhibit polysemy. Provide your own definition of polysemy.

b. Based on what you have learned about Access Semantics, provide a semantic characterisation of each of the three distinct lexical concepts for `declare`. What makes each distinct?

c. What evidence might you use, in terms of semantic and/or grammatical selectional tendencies, to demonstrate that each example of `declare` does indeed relate to a distinct lexical concept? You may wish to generate, or find, other linguistic examples of `declare` to support your argumentation.

2 Lexical profiles

Based on the discussion in section 3.1.1. of Chapter 18, consider the following linguistic examples:

(1) stale bread/cake/cheese, etc.
(2) rotten fruit/eggs/vegetables, etc.
(3) sour milk/yoghurt, etc.
(4) rancid butter/oil, etc.
a. Provide lexical profiles for the following lexical concepts: [stale], [rotten], [sour] and [rancid].

b. In your own words, say what distinguishes a semantic versus a grammatical selectional tendency.

c. Do the lexical profiles for these lexical concepts diverge in terms of grammatical or semantic selectional tendencies, or both? Explain your reasoning.

3 Cognitive model profiles

Consider the following linguistic examples, focusing on the referential vehicle: opened.

(1) a. John opened the window
    b. John opened his mouth
    c. John opened the book
    d. John opened his briefcase
    e. John opened the curtains
    f. The carpenter opened the wall
    g. The surgeon opened the wound
    h. The sapper opened the dam
    i. John opened the bank account

Access Semantics maintains that in examples such as these, the interpretation of opened arises, in part, from activation of a cognitive model profile.

a. Provide definitions, in your own words, of: lexical concept, cognitive model, and cognitive model profile.

b. Present a diagram of the cognitive model profile for opened that would potentially account for all the examples in (1).

c. Explain which cognitive model(s) within your diagram receive primary activation for each specific instance of opened, in these examples.

4 Accounting for meaning variation within a single cognitive model

Sometimes a lexical concept achieves interpretation due to divergent activation of distinct attributes within a single cognitive model. In light of this, consider the following examples, focusing on the referential vehicle book.

(1) That’s a heavy book.
(2) That antiquarian book is illegible.

a. What is the specific interpretation of book, in each example?

b. How might you characterise the cognitive model that facilitates these interpretations?
c. Speculate on what might constitute the distinct attributes, within this single cognitive model, that are differentially activated, facilitating these distinct interpretations.

5 Meaning construction and interpretation

Consider the following examples relating to the referential vehicle *France*, in the light of the discussion of interpretation in section 3.4 in Chapter 18.

(1) France is a region of outstanding natural beauty.
(2) France is a key player in European politics.

a. Say what the information characterisation is, in each case, for the lexical concept [FRANCE].
b. Provide an account of how an informational characterisation is achieved, in each case, for this lexical concept.