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Lexical Meaning

The ideal introduction for students of semantics, *Lexical Meaning* fills the gap left by more general semantics textbooks, providing the teacher and the student with insights into word meaning beyond the traditional overviews of lexical relations. The book explores the relationship between word meanings and syntax and semantics more generally. It provides a balanced overview of major theoretical approaches, along with a lucid explanation of their relative strengths and weaknesses. After covering the main topics in lexical meaning, such as polysemy and sense relations, the textbook surveys the types of meanings represented by different word classes. It explains abstract concepts in clear language, using a wide range of examples, and includes linguistic puzzles in each chapter to encourage the student to practice using the concepts. "Adopt-a-word" exercises give students the chance to research a particular word, building a portfolio of specialist work on a single word.

M. LYNNE MURPHY is Senior Lecturer in Linguistics in the School of English at the University of Sussex.

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521677646

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First published 2010
3rd printing 2014

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Murphy, M. Lynne.
Lexical meaning / M. Lynne Murphy.
p. cm. – (Cambridge textbooks in linguistics)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-521-86031-4 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-67764-6 (paperback)
1. Semantics. 2. Lexicology. I. Title. II. Series.
P325.M824 2010
401′.43 – dc22 2010024388

ISBN 978-0-521-86031-4 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-67764-6 Paperback

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Preface: using this book

Lexical semantics is approached by students of linguistics at various points in their undergraduate and graduate curricula, and this book is intended to suit anyone who has had some introduction to linguistics, but who has not yet studied lexical semantics in any depth. Given such a broad audience, it is inevitable that at some points in the text some readers will consider the material difficult and others will consider it a bit basic. My aim is to present problems of word meaning in all their messy glory – showing where there are interesting problems to be solved and considering multiple viewpoints on those problems. The big questions of how meanings work have been pondered for centuries, but the answers remain elusive, since how these questions can be answered depends upon the background assumptions about the nature of language, meaning, and mind that different approaches bring to them. In order to limit the range of background assumptions, this book is biased toward componential theories that are compatible with generative approaches to grammar. For readers who already have some general knowledge about linguistic theories, this book demonstrates how those approaches tackle issues of word meaning. Readers for whom these theories are not yet familiar will discover how their perspectives vary when it comes to the lexicon and meaning. If this leaves you wanting more information about the theories generally, the "Further reading" section near the end of each chapter plots out a proposed course of reading to broaden and deepen your knowledge of these subjects.

Adopt-a-word

Two types of exercise are provided at the end of each chapter. The general exercises provide problems to think about and new data with which to practice the concepts introduced in the chapter. In addition to these, each chapter has some "Adopt-a-word" assignments. These assignments allow you to explore the concepts introduced in the text through the perspective of a single word. We will cover a variety of topics and theoretical perspectives in a limited number of pages, but if you specialize in a particular word, you will be able to explore those topics in some depth and build on the knowledge you gain from chapter to chapter, rather than just flitting from one topic to the next. While you may

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cover a lot of linguistic ground, you will follow a coherent theme – the study of a particular word.

You may choose a word that interests you for Adopt-a-word, or, if you have no word in mind, you can choose one of the adoptable words at the end of this preface.

If you would like to choose your own word, keep the following in mind:

- Ideally, your word should be established enough to have been covered in standard dictionaries, otherwise it will be difficult to do some of the assignments.
- Your word should have three to seven senses in such a dictionary – anything more and you may find yourself writing a book rather than a short essay for any particular assignment.
- Be sure to consider words other than nouns, particularly verbs and adjectives.
- In my own course, I have disallowed certain swear words – not out of any sense of prudishness, but because there has been enough interest in these words that whole books have been written on them, and thus there is little left for the student to discover on her own.
- While the words I suggest below are from English, you can do Adopt-a-word assignments with words from any language with which you are sufficiently familiar (or have sufficient resources to study).

Until chapter 8, most assignments will suit most words, but after that point we start looking at particular types of meanings. So, for example, if your word is a noun and never used as a verb, it is unlikely that the assignments in chapter 10 will be relevant to it, but the ones in chapter 8 will be particularly interesting to do. If you do not adopt a particular word for the whole of the course, then the Adopt-a-word assignments can still be done with different words in different chapters – choose from any of the words at the end of the preface.

A note for instructors

The Adopt-a-word scheme lends itself well to portfolio assessment, since it results in a group of assignments with a coherent theme. The portfolio can be comprised of the best three or so of the student's written assignments. This can be especially useful for developing a course that is strong on writing and revision, as required in many universities. The Adopt-a-word scheme also ensures that students are doing active and original research from the outset of their lexicological study. You can customize the assignments to the level and requirements of your course by including additional requirements, such as the number or type of bibliographic sources to be used. The Adopt-a-word assignments also make good topics for small-group discussions. Additional Adopt-a-word assignments

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can also be invented for broader lexicology courses for issues like morphology, etymology, usage controversies, social variation, acquisition, and so forth.

Some words for adoption

These words have been tried and tested in Adopt-a-word courses. Some of these may be more interesting for students of British English than of American (or other) English, or vice versa. Before making a final decision, do a little research on the word in order to see if it suits you and your dialectal interests.

adult	*band*	*blond(e)*
buff	*bug*	*camp*
care	*clap*	*cool*
dark	*dice*	*diet*
fiddle	*flow*	*fret*
fringe	*funk*	*gamble*
glamo(u)r	*gray/grey*	*guess*
guy	*hip*	*kit*
lad	*lodge*	*log*
mad	*meat*	*mint*
moist	*pants*	*partner*
poor	*punk*	*purse*
sad	*sneak*	*spin*
stuff	*talent*	*tattoo*
text	*true*	*wave*
wild	*zero*	*zip*

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Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to colleagues and students for their generosity in giving feedback on various parts of the manuscript that led to this book. Many thanks to: Lynne Cahill, Seongsook Choi and her students, Richard Coates, Vyv Evans, Cliff Goddard, Georgia Green, Melanie Green, Sascha Griffiths, Ray Jackendoff (who provided some interesting examples for chapters 8–10), Steven Jones, Anu Koskela, Diana McCarthy, Carita Paradis, Roberta Piazza, Elena Tribushinina, Christian Uffmann, Max Wheeler, Anna Wierzbicka, the students on Approaches to Meaning (in English), Language and Linguistics, Semantics and Structure of English II at Sussex University, and the anonymous reviewers of the proposal and manuscript. The usual disclaimers apply; I hope that I have done well by the comments given to me.

Anu Koskela, who at various times has been my co-teacher on most of the semantics courses at Sussex, deserves special mention. She has provided and facilitated many kinds of feedback on the work presented here, and has also contributed the drawings in chapters 3, 4, 8, and 11, and the Wittgenstein/Wierzbicka exercise in chapter 3. I thank her for her generosity and her intellectual and visual precision.

Thanks to the Department of Linguistics and English Language at Sussex for the leave time that got this book started and the general support of my colleagues there.

I cannot fail to acknowledge Arden Lily Murphy Viner, whose arrival in this world (dramatic as it was) terrifically slowed down the completion of the manuscript – but, boy, was she worth it. Lots of love and gratitude to her dad and my partner, Phil, who was instrumental in the finishing of this book, in spite of the obvious distractions.

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Typographical conventions

*	marks ungrammatical examples.
#	marks semantically or pragmatically anomalous (odd) examples.
? or ??	marks examples that are grammatically or semantically difficult to process or subject to an atypical interpretation. These are slightly "better" than examples marked by #. The more ?s, the more questionable the example is.
italics	signal a "metalinguistic" use of an expression – that is, use of the expression to refer to itself as an expression, rather than in its normal sense. For example, the word *water* is italicized when it refers to the word *water* and not when it refers to actual water.
'single'	Single quotation marks enclose a gloss (description of the meaning) of an expression or of aspects of an expression.
SM CAPS	Small capital letters signal reference to a concept, ontological category (see chapter 7), or semantic component.

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