

1 Meaning and semantics

- **3 levels of meaning**
 - EXPRESSION MEANING
 - UTTERANCE MEANING
 - COMMUNICATIVE MEANING

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➤ Expression meaning

- Corresponds to ***phrasal meaning*** or ***sense***

I don't need your bicycle.

- *need, bicycle* content words
- *I, do, not, your* function words
- The meaning of content words are concepts. It describes what it refers to, i.e. it is ***descriptive meaning***
- The meaning of function words contributes to the descriptive meaning of the sentence.

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(1) *I don't need your bicycle.*

- Phrasal meaning results from putting the words together

need: sth. is important for so

bicycle: two-wheeled vehicle

I: (instruction to find out who is the) speaker

not: negation

do: present tense (soa takes place at utterance time)

your: addressee who is in a particular relationship to some entity

- Sentence (phrasal) meaning of (1):

'for the speaker, the two-wheeled vehicle of the addressee(s) is not very important, at the time when s is being uttered'

It is left open who the speaker and the addressee(s) are, what particular time is referred to and which bicycle.

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➤ UTTERANCE MEANING

- corresponds to *speaker meaning* or *meaning*

(1) *'I don't need your bicycle*

The meaning which results if the sentence is uttered in a specific scenario:

- **S1** 1 August 1996, morning: Mary has been planning a trip to town that afternoon. Two days before, she talked with her neighbor John about the trip and asked him to lend her his bike for the trip. She had lent her car to her daughter and did not know if she would get it back in time. Meanwhile her daughter is back and has returned Mary's car. Mary is talking with John on her mobile, telling him, embedded within the usuals small talk: (1)

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(1) *I don't need your bicycle.*

- If (1) is used in a particular scenario, the references are fixed. If the sentence is used in S1, the sentence is true. But in a slightly different scenario it might be false.

(scenario/world/context/constellation)

- As long as (1) is not actually used with concrete reference, it fails to be true or false.
 - The question of truth primarily concerns DECLARATIVE sentences.
cf. (1) to *Do you need a bicycle?* or *Take my bicycle!*

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(1) *I don't need your bicycle.*

- (1) can be true in different scenarios, cf. *S1* and *S2*.
 - *S2*: Same time and place. John's five-year-old daughter Maggie is playing at home with her five-year-old friend Titus. They are playing with a game of cards that display all kinds of vehicles. Titus is in the possession of a card that shows a snowmobile. Maggie is eager to exchange this card for one of hers and offers Titus a card with a bicycle. Titus rejects the exchange saying (1).
- The word meaning of *bicycle* is shifted to fit the given context, i.e. the expression meaning may be subject to certain kinds of ***meaning shifts***.

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➤ **CONTEXT OF UTTERANCE**

- The **CONTEXT OF UTTERANCE (CoU)** is the sum of circumstances that bear on reference and truth. The most important ones:
 - speaker
 - addressee
 - utterance time
 - utterance place
 - the facts given when the utterance is produced
- The context is indicated by particular linguistic expressions

(1) *I don't need your bicycle.*

(2) *Peter will be here tomorrow'.*

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➤ COMMUNICATIVE MEANING

- Communicative function of an utterance.

(1) *I don't need your bicycle.*

- Neither the level of expression meaning nor that of utterance meaning is the primary level on which we interpret verbal utterances. In an actual exchange, our main concern inevitably is this: what is the speaker's intention?

S1:

(1) can be taken as a statement and thereby as a *withdrawal* of a former request.

S2:

(1) can be interpreted as a *refusal* of an offer.

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- A theory that addresses the communicative use of expressions **is *speech act theory***, introduced in the 1950s by John L. Austin and developed further by John R. Searle.
- Whenever one makes an utterance in a verbal exchange, one acts on several levels:
 - 'locutionary act' (using a certain expression with a certain meaning)
 - 'illocutionary act' (in performing a locutionary act one also performs an illocutionary act on the level on which the utterance constitutes a certain type of 'speech act': a *statement, a question, a request, a promise, etc.*

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➤ Summary

- SEMANTICS is the study of the meanings of linguistic expressions, either simple or complex, taken in isolation. It further accounts for the way utterance meaning, i.e., the meaning of an expression used in a concrete context of utterance, is related to expression meaning.
- Level of meaning
 - expression meaning (sense)
(the meaning of a simple or complex expression taken in isolation)
 - utterance meaning (meaning)
(the meaning of an expression when used in a given context of utterance; fixed reference and truth value (for declarative sentences))
 - communicative meaning
(the meaning of an utterance as a communicative act in a given social setting)

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➤ **SENTENCE MEANING AND COMPOSITIONALITY**

- **LEXICAL MEANING**

Word meanings are must be known and therefore learned. The word meaning are stored in our mental lexicon. Stored meaning is called **LEXICAL MEANING**

- **GRAMMATICAL MEANING**

GRAMMATICAL MEANING is determined by a word form and particular syntactical configurations.

- **COMPOSITIONAL MEANING**

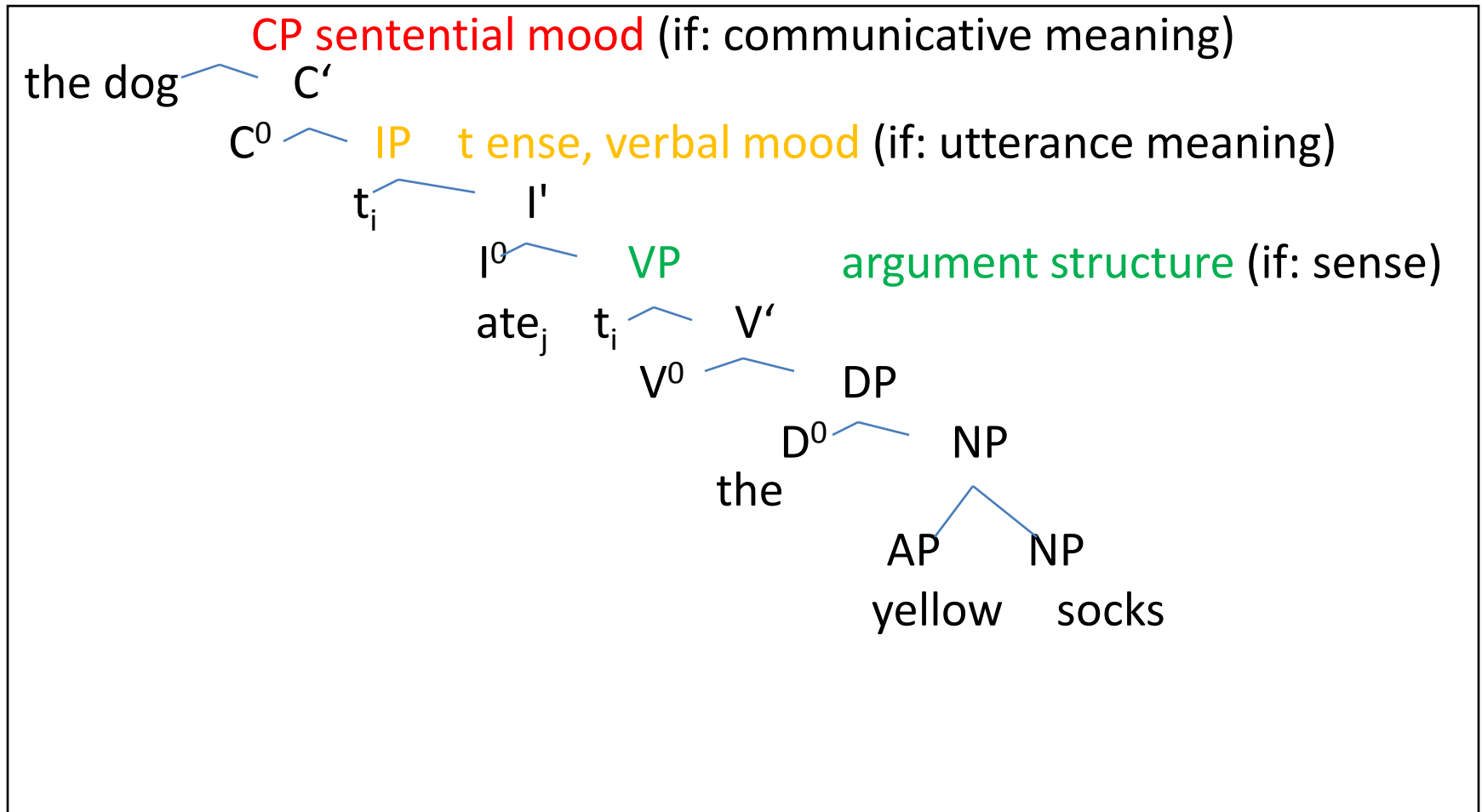
Sentence meaning is derived from lexical meanings. This process is called **COMPOSITION**. Complex expressions whose meanings are not stored in the Lexicon have **COMPOSITIONAL MEANING**.

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➤ **COMPOSITIONAL MEANING**

- The (lexical + grammatical) word meanings are combined into a whole, the meaning of a sentence.
- The composition of the whole sentence meaning draws on three sources:
 - LEXICAL MEANINGS of the basic expressions (lex. items)
 - the GRAMMATICAL FORMS of the basic expressions
 - the SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE of the complex expressions

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➤ Composition rules for:

- AP + NP modification
- Det + NP reference
- V^0 + DP argument structure
- V' + SpecVP argument structure
- I^0 + VP tense, verbal mood
- C^0 + IP sentential mood

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- The Principle of Compositionality yields a convenient division of semantics into the following subdisciplines:
 - LEXICAL SEMANTICS expression meanings stored in the mental lexicon (*sock, I, the, need*) [basic vocabulary of syntax]
 - COMPOSITIONAL WORD SEMANTICS the meanings of words that are formed by the rules of word formation (*mousify, mouse food, ...*) [basic vocabulary of morphology]
 - SEMANTICS OF GRAMMATICAL FORMS the meaning contribution of grammatical forms
 - meaning, the range of possible utterance meanings. UTTERANCE MEANING mechanisms (e.g. meaning shifts, reference) that determine, on the basis of the compositionally derived expression

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➤ **PRINCIPLE OF COMPOSITIONALITY**

The meaning of a complex expression is determined by the lexical meanings of its components, their grammatical meanings and the syntactic structure as a whole.

The principle implies that the meanings of complex expressions are fully determined by lexical meanings, grammatical meanings, and syntactic structure.