Alternative Conceptions of Semantics

- Model-theoretic, or “truth conditional” semantics
  
  “To know the meaning of an indicative sentence is to know what the world has to be like for that sentence to be true...This fact is the starting-point for logical semantics” (Allwood, Andersson, and Dahl, 1997)

- Cognitive semantics, ‘frame semantics’

  “...words represent categorizations of experience, and each of these categories is underlain by a motivating situation occurring against a background of knowledge and experience.” (Fillmore, 1982)
Alternative Conceptions of Semantics

- An analogy between grammars and tools

“One possible way of divising a fuller account of lexical semantics is to associate some mechanism for deriving sets of truth conditions for a clause from semantic information individually attached to given predicates; but it seems to me more profitable to believe that there are larger cognitive structures capable of providing a new layer of semantic role notions in terms of which whole domains of vocabulary could be semantically characterized” (Fillmore, 1975)
Frame Semantics

1. ‘Accuse’ vs. ‘Criticize’
   • Accuse: Presupposes blameworthiness of ‘Situation’, asserts that ‘Judge’ claims that the ‘Defendant’ is responsible for Situation
   • Criticize: Presupposes that the ‘Defendant’ is responsible for Situation, asserts that ‘Judge’ claims that Situation is blameworthy

2. ‘Buy’ vs. ‘Sell’ vs. ‘Pay’
   • Buy: focus on buyer, backgrounding seller and goods
   • Sell: focus on seller, backgrounding buyer and goods
   • Pay: focus on buyer with respect to money and seller, backgrounding the goods
Frame Semantics

• The need to frame meaning

  “...nobody could be said to know the meanings of these verbs who did not know the details of the kind of scene which provided the background and motivation for the categories which these words represent” (Fillmore, 1975)

• Consider the meaning of words like
  – ‘orphan’
  – ‘vegetarian’
  – ‘bachelor’
Alternative Framings

- The same facts can be presented within different framings (which can make them look like different facts)

- ‘Stingy’ vs. ‘thrifty’ in describing an unwillingness to give out money in a given situation
  
  - Stingy : Generous
    * Evaluation with respect to treatment of fellow people
  
  - Thrifty : Wasteful
    * Evaluation with respect to skill or wisdom displayed in the use of money
Contrast within and across Frames

• Gives us two ways of presenting a negation or opposition

• Within a frame (accept the scale, question the placement)

  (1) He’s not stingy, he’s generous.

• Across a frame (question the scale, accept the placement)

  (2) He’s not stingy, he’s thrifty.
Frames for Evaluation

• Evaluative adjectives
  – ‘Tall’, ‘fast’
  – ‘Good’: a good pilot, good coffee, a good mother

• Information may derive from general background knowledge, or brought into play by the textual context
  – A good stick

• ‘Imitation’