

Introduction to Linguistics:

Semantics: interpreting signs

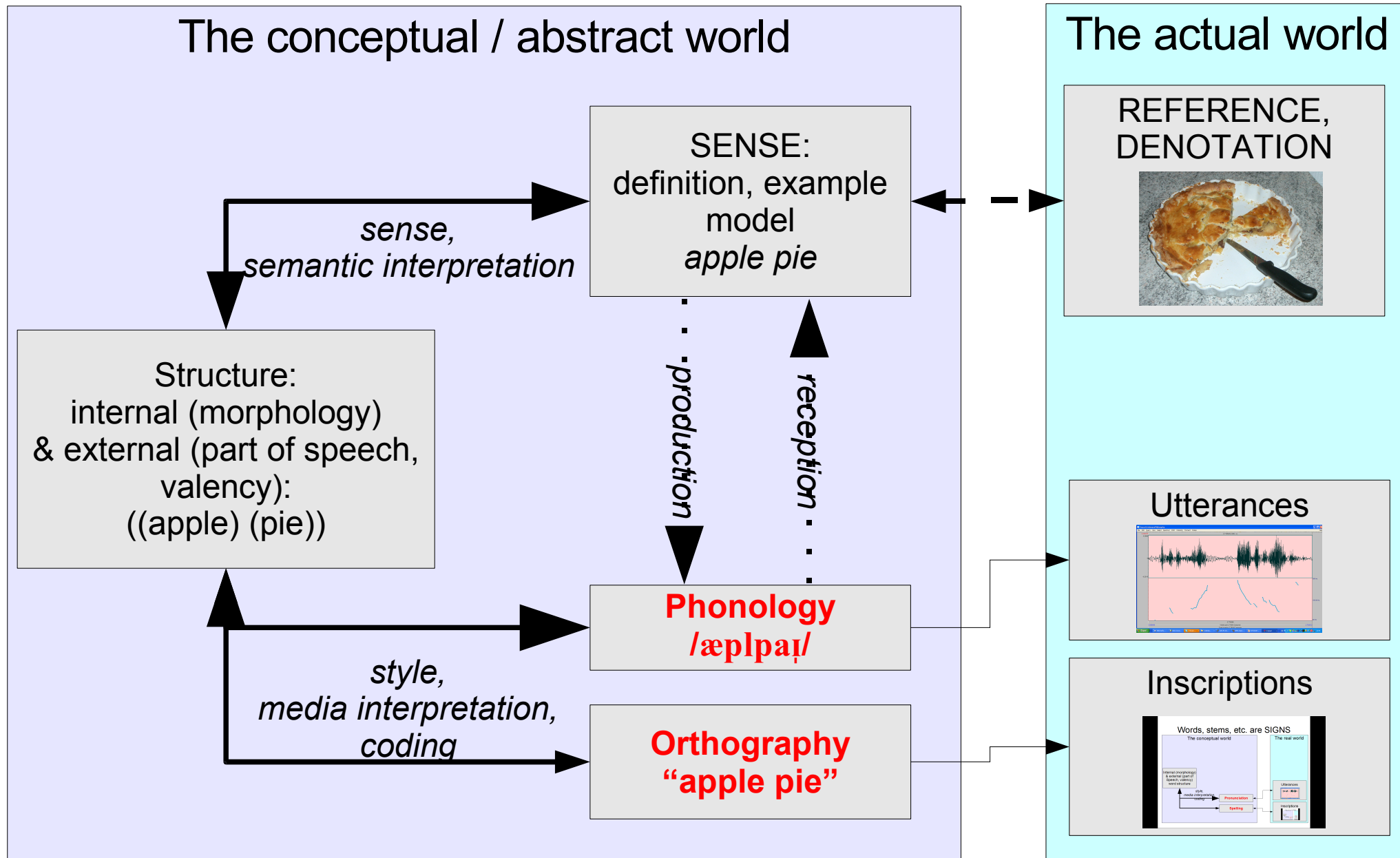
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Basic Module 2

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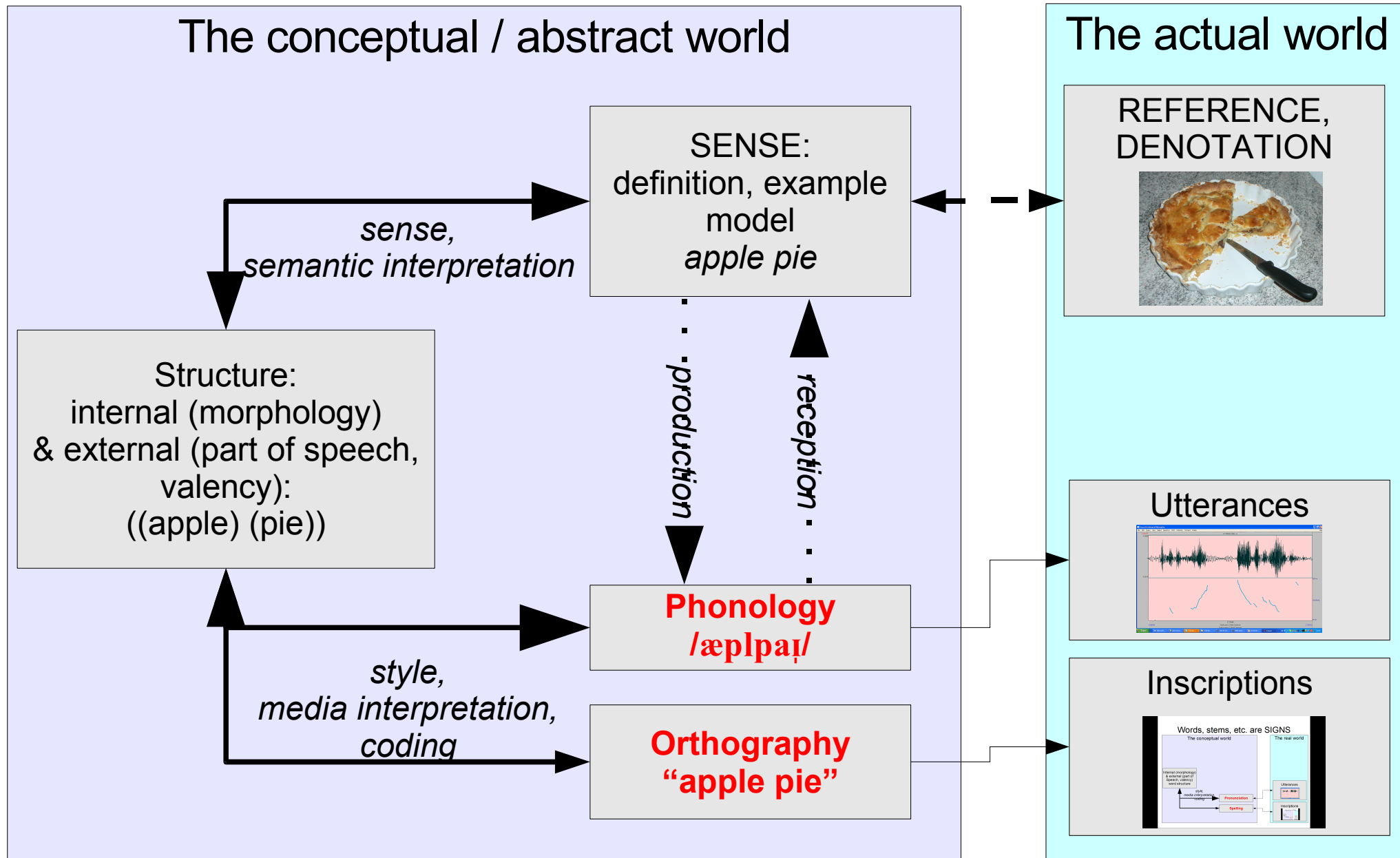
Words, stems, etc. are SIGNS



The conceptual and actual worlds

- Language signs (and other signs) can be discussed in terms of two domains:
 - the conceptual / cognitive / mental domain
 - the actual domain of behaviour and interaction by particular people at a given time and place
- Noam Chomsky distinguishes between
 - *competence* (implicit knowledge of a language)
 - *performance* (actual use of a language in concrete situations)
- The first domain concerns *knowledge of the language*:
 - Note the distinction between
 - knowledge *of* a language
 - (implicit knowledge, competence, which everybody has)
 - knowledge *about* a language
 - (explicit, metalinguistic knowledge, which linguists have)

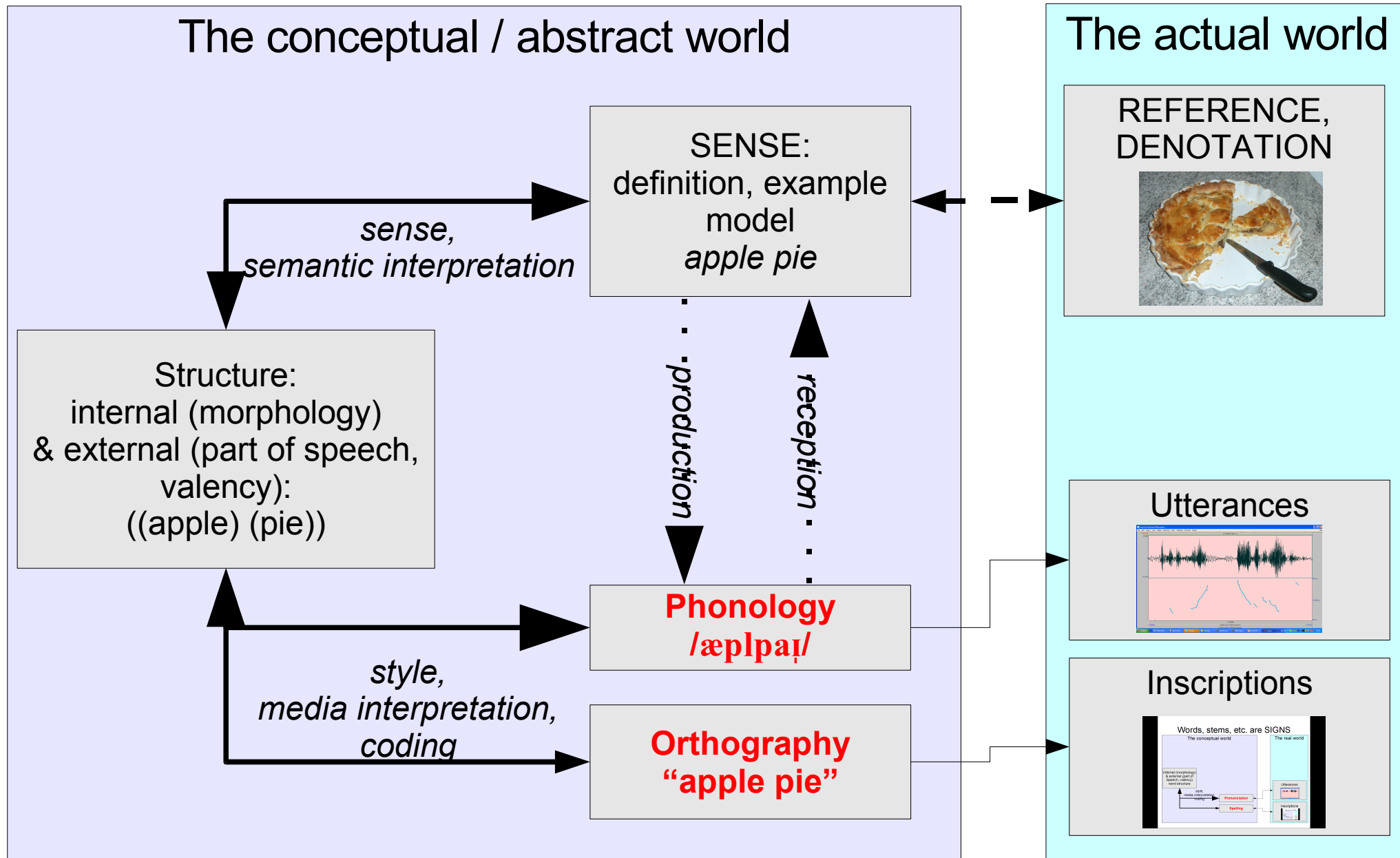
Words, stems, etc. are SIGNS



Sense and reference

- The term “meaning” is ambiguous; it has
 - a general aspect: *sense* (German: *Sinn*)
 - the combination of lexical and sentence meanings of an expression, dependent on semantic relations within the language
 - a specific, concrete aspect: *reference* (German: *Bedeutung*)
 - the actual objects, entities, events, etc., in the world, which an expression refers to
- Example 1:
 - the *senses* of the expressions “morning star”, “evening star”, “second planet from the sun”, “the planet Venus” are different
 - the *reference* of the expressions is the same
- Example 2:
 - the *senses* of the expressions “President of Bavaria” and “Dr. Edmund Stoiber” are different
 - the *reference* of the expressions is the same

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 - the *reference* of the expressions is the same (at the moment)

Meanings

- What is a meaning?
- What has a meaning?
- Signs of all kinds
 - verbal signs
 - phonemes
 - morphemes, words
 - sentences
 - texts
 - dialogues
 - Discussion: What are the meanings of each of these sign types?
 - non-verbal signs
 - Discussion: Give examples of non-verbal signs and their me
 - signs in different modalities/media
 - Discussion: visual, acoustic, tactile, olfactory

Semantic sign types (C.S. Peirce)

- Index:
 - a sign with a relationship of *physical proximity* with its meaning:
 - place
 - cause
 - Examples ...
- Icon:
 - a sign with a relationship of *similarity* with its meaning
 - visual similarity
 - acoustic similarity
 - maybe similarity in the other senses
 - Examples ...
- Symbol:
 - a sign with an *arbitrary* relationship with its meaning
 - Examples ...

Analyse these signs ...



“Descriptive” vs. “subjective” meanings

- Descriptive meanings:
 - concern properties of persons, places, things, events, ...
 - Examples:
 - any concrete object ...
 - any abstract entity ...
- Subjective meanings:
 - concern attitudes of the speaker and hearer
 - Examples:
 - appraisive expressions
 - taboo expressions
 - Discussion:
 - similarities and differences between English and German?

LEXICAL SEMANTICS

Dictionary definitions of meaning

- Definiendum
- Definiens
 - genus proximum
 - differentia specifica
- Examples:
 - woman
 - cousin
 - knife
 - tomato
 - lion
 - love
 - Iraq
 - Buddhism

Semantic components

- property components:
 - features:
 - abstract vs. concrete
 - human vs. nonhuman
 - animate vs. inanimate
 - male vs. female
 - young vs. old
 - Examples: child, woman, ...
- relation components:
 - features:
 - bigger
 - parent
 - ..
 - Examples: aunt, grandfather, cousin
-

An example text for kinship terms

OTTAWA (AFP) - A Canadian court has effectively redefined family structure in recognizing a woman as the third parent of her longtime lesbian lover's young son. The Ontario Court of Appeal angered religious groups when it ruled in the parental custody case late Tuesday that the same-sex couple and the five-year-old boy's father could all legally claim to be his parents. The decision reversed a 2003 lower court decision that allowed for only one mother and one father, and in doing so dramatically redefined the country's parental custody laws.

The case involved a lesbian couple who, after being together since 1990, decided to have a child with the help of a male friend who would donate sperm and become the child's father. They wanted the court to recognize the woman who was not the biological mother as a parent. But they also wanted to avoid having her adopt the boy, which under the standing two-parent law would have required the father to give up custody.

In their ruling, the appeals court judges said Canada's 1970s child custody laws were outdated and did not reflect the best interests of the child in the case. "There is no doubt that the legislature did not foresee for the possibility of declarations of parentage for two women, but that is a product of the social conditions and medical knowledge at the time," the judges wrote. As such, "the act does not deal with, nor contemplate, the disadvantages that a child born into a relationship of two mothers, two fathers or, as in this case, two mothers and one father might suffer."

Semantic relations

- taxonomy (generalisation-specialisation relation)
 - hyponym
 - hyperonym (hypernym)
- meronymy (part-whole relation)
- synonym:
- antonym:
 - opposite
 - complementary
 - inverse
- co-hyponym

Identify semantic relations

Furniture and wooden objects are part of our lives every day. Some are utilitarian, such as a chair at the dining table; others are aesthetic, such as an antique sculpture or carving; still others may have an emotional or symbolic importance as mementos, such as a chest that has been in the family for years. Whatever their nature or purpose, if they are important to us they deserve the best care we can provide for them - unlike the chair illustrated on the cover of the video case, which is being gently misused.

The information in this booklet is not about restoring or repairing furniture and wooden objects; it is about caring for and preventing damage to them. Understanding and dealing with the causes of damage are well within the abilities of nearly all caretakers of valued wooden objects, whether a collections manager at a major museum or an individual safeguarding family heirlooms. The aim of this booklet is to explain how to minimize the preventable damage to furniture.

Semantic prototype: “typical” specimen

- Wikipedia: Prototype Theory is a model of graded categorization in Cognitive Science, where some members of a category are more central than others. For example, when asked to give an example of the concept furniture, chair is more frequently cited than, say, lamp.



Dictionary definitions

an-i-mal¹ /'ænɪməl/ *n* 1 a living creature, not a plant, that has senses and is able to move itself when it wants to: *Snakes, fish, and birds are all animals.* | *Humans are the most intelligent of all the animals.* | *Man is a political animal.*

creature /'kri:tʃə/ *n* 1 a living being of any kind, but not a plant; an animal, bird, fish, etc.: *The crocodile is a strange-looking creature.* | *creatures from outer space* 2

be-ing¹ /'bi:ɪŋ/ *n* 1 [U] the state of existing: *When did the universe first come into being?* | *This rule was brought into being because the old law was being abused.* 2 [C] a living thing, esp. a person: *a human being* | *strange beings from outer space* | *the Supreme Being (= God)*

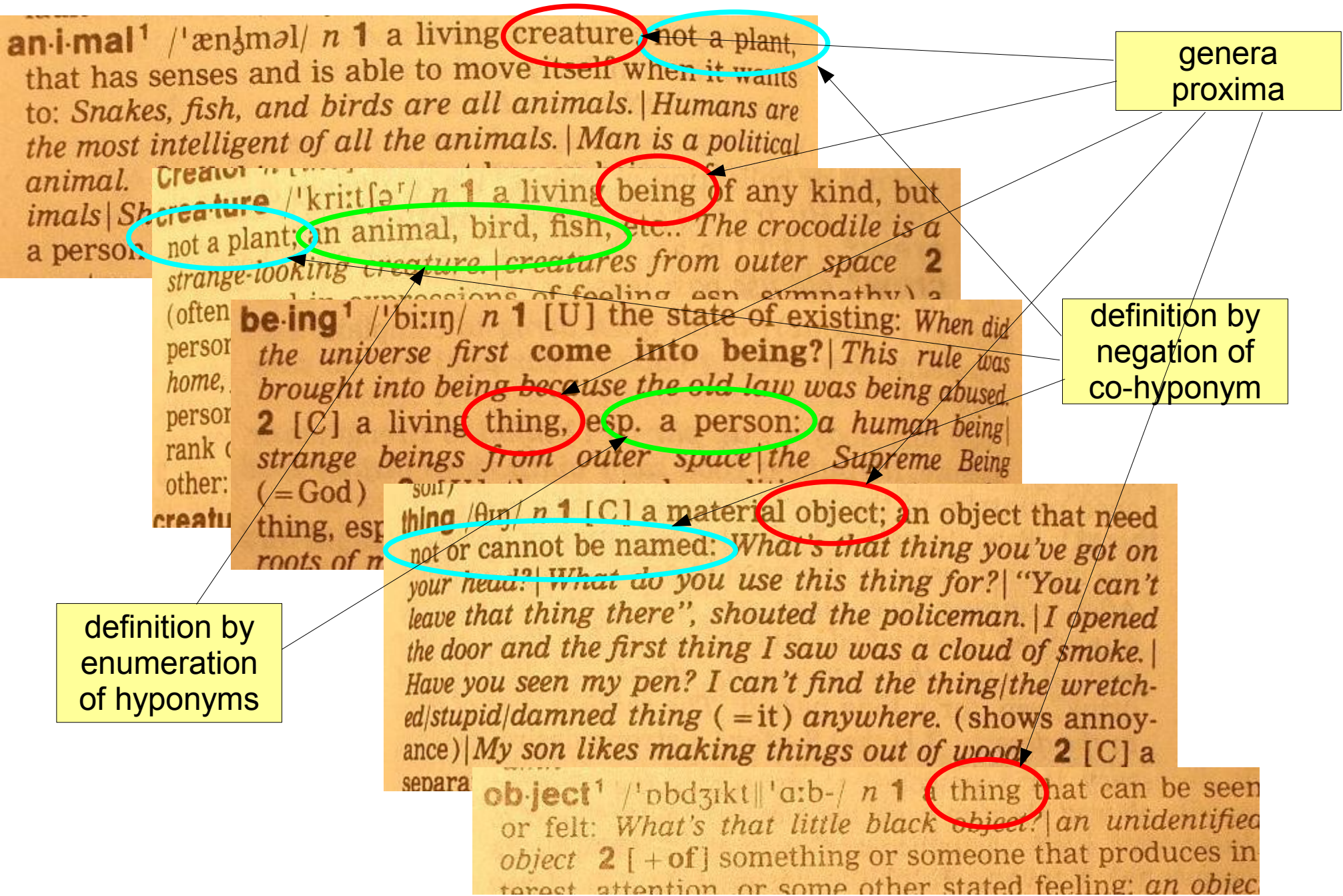
thing /θɪŋ/ *n* 1 [C] a material object; an object that need not or cannot be named: *What's that thing you've got on your head?* | *What do you use this thing for?* | *"You can't leave that thing there", shouted the policeman.* | *I opened the door and the first thing I saw was a cloud of smoke.* | *Have you seen my pen? I can't find the thing/the wretched/stupid/damned thing (=it) anywhere.* (shows annoyance) | *My son likes making things out of wood.* 2 [C] a

object¹ /'ɒbdʒɪkt||'ɑ:b-/ *n* 1 a thing that can be seen or felt: *What's that little black object?* | *an unidentified object* 2 [+of] something or someone that produces interest, attention, or some other stated feeling: *an objec*

genera proxima

definition by negation of co-hyponym

definition by enumeration of hyponyms



Compositional meaning

- What do the following units add to the meanings of their parts?
 - derived word:
 - *unattainable*, ...
 - compound word:
 - *roundabout*, ...
 - sentence:
 - *these cats chased twenty mice* (cf.: *twenty mice chased these cats*)
 - *colourless green ideas sleep furiously*

Tasks on lexical semantics

- Find examples in English and German of
 - indices, icons, symbols
- Find examples of at least 3 appraisive expressions in English and German
- Find examples of at least 3 taboo expressions in English and German
- What would be a prototypical
 - car, dog, dog, (find 3 more examples)
- Make your own definition for “casting show”
- Describe the meaning of
 - *The Scissor Sisters sing.*
 - *Today the Scissor Sisters sing.*

SENTENCE SEMANTICS: QUANTIFICATION

Find the quantifiers

One moral aspect of the Iraq war that seems to me to have been under-estimated is the ultimate, moral responsibility of the United States for the thousands of civilian Iraqis murdered under U.S. occupation. Yes, obviously, the vast majority of these deaths were not at the hands of U.S. forces. Yes, obviously, Iraqis - Sunni and Shia - bear responsibility to some extent. But the laws of warfare - the moral guidelines for just warfare - insist that an invading and occupying army is responsible for the basic security of the population under its care. We broke it; we own it.

The violence that has taken so many did not happen immediately. It grew slowly, with forewarning. It took off after the bombing of the Samarra mosque last February. All of it was foretold; and many urged passionately for more troops to maintain order from 2003 onward. The president and his war-criminal of a defense secretary heeded not a word. They sent no more troops. They allowed one of the most brutal civil wars in modern history to gather pace under America's watch. The blood of 34,000 Iraqi civilians last year therefore finds its way onto the hands of Bush and Cheney and Rumsfeld. By refusing to fight a serious war, to commit enough troops for security, and to adjust as circumstances shifted, they let these innocent people die by the thousands, and they have abandoned those who risked their lives for us to scenes from Hieronymus Bosch.

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Tasks on quantification

- Find paraphrases for
 - many urged passionately...
 - ... heeded not a word
 - All of it was foretold
- What can you deduce from “not everybody came”?
 - nobody came
 - somebody came
 - not many came
 - somebody did not come
 - many did not come

SENTENCE SEMANTICS:

CONJUNCTIONS

Find the conjunctions

Firstly, let's revisit what a WebOS is. A WebOS is a web-based app (generally powered by either AJAX or Flash technologies) that emulates the application capabilities of an operating system. It's basically a virtual desktop that gives you communication tools (like email and instant messaging), productivity tools like word processing, and ability to play games and any other application that you'd find on a typical OS like Microsoft Windows.

But that's not all - a WebOS should be an expandable platform (just like Windows) that gives developers the right tools (IDE, APIs) to develop new applications and add new utilities. And that's the advantage of a Web-based "OS" - it gives you the new ability to use it remotely and not be restricted to one PC. This is a huge need in today's world, because increasingly we use more than one computer from various different locations. So each time we sit down to a computer, a different scene awaits us - different applications and different documents. WebOS can solve this inefficiency, by taking your productivity with you everywhere you go.

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Tasks on conjunctions

- If John is tired, then he drinks coffee.
 - What can you deduce from this?
 - If John drinks coffee, then he is tired.
 - If John drinks coffee then he is not tired.
 - If John does not drink coffee, then he is not tired.
- John drinks coffee and Mary drinks red wine.
 - What can you deduce from this?
 - John drinks coffee or Mary drinks red wine.
 - John doesn't drink coffee or Mary doesn't drink red wine.
 - It is not true that John doesn't drink coffee or Mary doesn't drink red wine.
- Figure out some more logical equivalences using
 - conjunctions
 - *not*