

What are we going to study in this class?

Ling324

## Meaning from Linguistic Expression: Semantics

- Sentences in natural language convey information. The information conveyed by a linguistic expression is the MEANING of that expression.
- If we know a language, we understand what a sentence means in that language, even if we have never heard that sentence before.

(1) A purple elephant ate the basketball.

In fact, we can understand the meaning conveyed by an infinite number of sentences. How is this possible?

## Meaning from Linguistic Expression: Semantics (cont.)

- To understand the meaning of a sentence, we need to know the meaning of individual parts of the sentence and how they are combined.
  - (2) It is not the case that the tall man walked slowly but the young woman with red hat walked quickly.
  - (3) a. A: Did you stop beating your dog?  
b. B: No.
  - (4) Everybody loves someone.
    - a. “Everybody is such that there is someone s/he loves.”
    - b. “There is someone that everybody loves.”

How can we formally characterize the meaning of words, phrases and sentences?

How can we formally characterize the procedure in which the meaning of words and phrases are combined?

How can we formally represent the meaning structure of a sentence?

# Meaning from outside Linguistic Expression: Pragmatics

- Part of the meaning of a sentence does not come from the parts of the sentence itself or the way they are combined. It comes from world knowledge or from inferences based on conversational rules in discourse.
  - (5) My grandmother started walking five miles a day when she was sixty. She's ninety-three today and we don't know where the hell she is.
  - (6) This recipe is certainly silly. It says to separate two eggs, but it doesn't say how far to separate them.
  - (7) a. A: What do you think of Nancy's style?  
B: Well, you know, **other professors wear a suit when they teach.**  
b. A: How does Nancy dress when she teaches?  
B: Actually, I'm not sure about her, but **other professors wear a suit when they teach.**

How does literal meaning of a sentence interact with world knowledge and discourse contexts?

# Semantics vs. Pragmatics

- Semantics

The investigation of the literal meaning of sentences belongs to SEMANTICS. It investigates the interpretation of words, phrases and sentence, how the meaning of a phrase is related to the meaning of its parts, and what sorts of meaning structures and meaning relations obtain in natural language.

- Pragmatics

The investigation of the meaning of a sentence that comes from world knowledge and conversational rules in discourse contexts belong to PRAGMATICS.

- In this class, we'll be concentrating on the semantic side of meaning for the most part. We'll then talk a little bit about the pragmatic side of meaning with an emphasis on how it is distinguished from semantics.