



## LESSON THREE

# **B.ED IN LANGUAGES**

## **LNG 231 – LINGUISTIC THEORY-SEMANTICS**

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## Lesson 3 – Cognition

**Upon completion of this lesson you will be able to explain the following terms:**



**Outcomes**

Componential Analysis

Necessity

Sufficiency/adequacy

Generalness



| <b>TERMINOLOGIES</b>  | <b>EXPLANATION</b>                                      |
|-----------------------|---|
| Componential Analysis | Breaking down or assembling the qualities of an entity. |
| Necessity             | Very important to describe an entity.                   |
| Sufficiency/adequacy  | Enough to describe the entity.                          |
| Generalness           | Features are common to all members of the set.          |

Semantics is not concerned with the factual status of things in the world but with meaning in language. The notion of universe of discourse is introduced to account for the way in which language allows us to refer to non-existent things.

Words are normally different from the things or physical items and ideas they actually mean or signify. For e.g. the word book has no relationship with the item that we write in, read or e.t.c. Other than that, we would refer to things in the same way, and there would be only one language on this earth. The form of a word has no connection with the meaning of that word. So what do we assign to words and how do we do that? This is why diff. Langs. Have diff. words for the same concept.

When we view meaning from the feelings, images and attitudes which speakers assign to language items, then we are delving into the concept of cognition. This is the connection between language (made of arbitrary signs and symbols) and the perception of those among whom it is used. Cognition recognizes the wideness of human knowledge, feelings and thoughts, and the equally wide possibilities of their being grouped or cut up into smaller entities. At the same time, it recognizes also the many



diff. words which each language group identifies. It is thus, a kind of intervention between words and ideas.

Cognition helps us to add, transfer, optimise, subtract compare, sequence, break and assemble from some established ideas. The processes through which these activities are carried out may be semantic field theory or componential analysis (breaking down or assembling the qualities of an entity), the prototype theory (finding the best example and comparing with it), semantic network approach (breaking down a whole area into its various constituent words or predicates) polysemic approach (transferring a basic, original characteristic idea into diff. situations or contexts in which it is used).

### COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS

This is breaking down or assembling the qualities of an entity. This states that the meaning of a word is the set of its critical or defining features. This approach is of the view that the sense of a word or object can be broken down into a number of minimal distinctive (or contrastive) component features (those features that describe that word or object). These features are called the **semantic features**. This approach views meaning as a composite of features. The features that a word or object possesses make the sense of that word or object.

For e.g.

Woman and girl can be analysed as follows:

| Woman   | Girl    |
|---------|---------|
| +human  | +human  |
| +female | +female |
| +adult  | - adult |

This analysis means that word “woman” has been broken down into its minimal units or features. That is a woman is first a human being, an adult (a grown person as against a young girl) and a female but not a male. Basically, these are the features that can be used adequately to describe a woman. No other features can be used in its description. This shows that the description of a woman differs from the description of girl only in terms of age. (Girl is young, woman is older/ an adult).

This type of analysis is similar to the Distinctive Feature Approach in Phonology. (where +, - are used).

## REPRESENTATION

The analysis of any word or object is based on two main approaches. These are features and form.



## Features

These are normally what are used to for the analysis of any word. For any feature to be used, it has to satisfy certain conditions. These conditions are necessity, sufficiency/adequacy and generalness.

## Necessity

Only the features that are necessary are to be used to analyze any specific word. All others are considered peripheral.

For instance, if we analyze “woman” as

- a)           +human
- +female
- +adult

as opposed to

- b)           +human
- +female
- +adult
- +skirt
- +motherhood
- +emotion

+tenderness,

Which one will we need to do a very simple analysis? a) of course.

### **Sufficiency/adequacy**

All the defining features put together should be sufficient in the description of any word. This will help differentiate one word from another.

For e.g. man can be analyzed as

+human

+male,

But is it enough? We need to add +/-adult/young to make it different from boy.

### **Generalness**

All features used must be general or common to all members of the set. For e.g. cars can be analyzed as

+wheels

+body

+steering

+Etc



If per chance the feature +open top, it would not have been a general feature. This is because not all cars are open tops; most of the cars do not have this feature. Once this feature is added, it ceases to be general. This is not included in the semantic features of car. Any feature(s) that is/are not general is/are called privative feature(s).

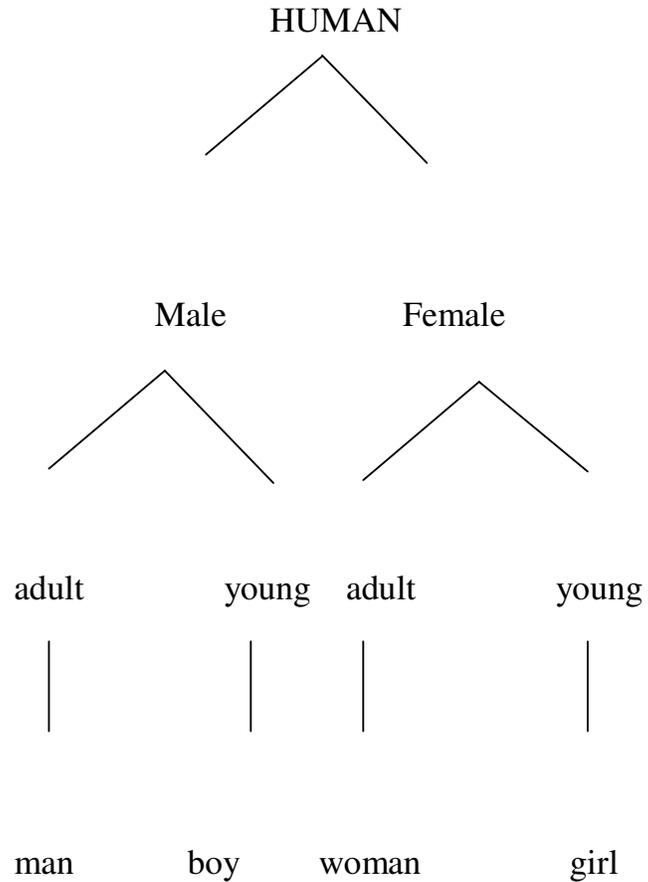
### **Form**

The form of representing the semantic or componential features can be done in three different ways:

### **Tree diagram or taxonomic hierarchical Method**

Here, the features are arranged into a group. This arrangement is the relationship of inclusion. This means that an item must possess all the features of the categories in which it is included in the hierarchy. It is also defined by these features.

For e.g. we can analyze man, woman, boy, girl as follows:



Using the diagram to define the various items on the last nodes, we have the following:

Man is included in the category adult, which is included in the category male, which is also included in human. It is seen componentially as adult, male human from the bottom and human, male, adult from the top.



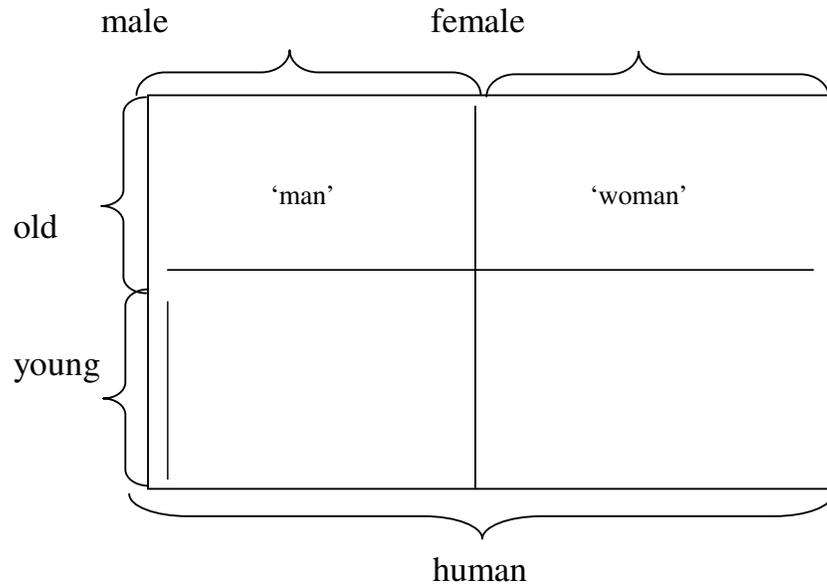
This form of representation is useful, in that it brings related senses into focus. A word is defined not just by its own senses, but also according to its place in the relationships in the hierarchy.

### Field Diagram Method

In this representation, a word is defined according to the following considerations:

- ❖ Its super ordinate sense-human is the super ordinate (or hyperonym) of man.
- ❖ Its place in the intersection of the dimensions which are used to construct the field.

The feature can be represented in a diagram on as:



### Semantic space of human

super ordinate (+human)

age (young, adult)

sex (male, female)

We realize that in addition to the fact that man is human, it is also seen as the intersection of adult and male, just as girl is an intersection of young and female.

### **The Binary Method**

This involves the use + or – to represent the presence or absence of a feature. Neutrality is marked as ○. So that if we call adult, then we are talking about ○ male or ○ sex.

### **Strengths**

Meaning is made more general than specific.

Meaning becomes scientific-generalisable and authentic or provable.

It makes it easy to explain hyponymy and antonymy. Antonyms have + or – of an attribute; but which also



share other features. It is these other features which give them basis for comparison or contrast. E.g. boy and girl are antonyms.

If any feature occurs in the sense of any two or more words, then these words are hyponyms of this common feature. Man, woman, boy, girl all shares the feature +human and so are seen as co-hyponyms of the super ordinate item 'human' which they all share.

It is very useful in showing synonymity.

### **Problems**

- ❖ It is generally used for denotative rather than connotative meaning. This is because componential analysis is based on features which are general.
- ❖ Connotation is not general, specific. Componential analysis is based on the actual reality of an item, which is its denotation.
- ❖ It can only be used to account for word meaning. Sentence and utterance meaning do not have much place in componential analysis.

## Unit summary



### Summary

We have looked at the Componential Analysis approach to meaning. We have looked at the features and forms of an entity. We also looked at the strengths and weaknesses of this approach.

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## Assignment



### Assignment

Read on the next lesson on the course outline. We will look at that lesson at our next meeting.

*SEE YOU NEXT WEEK*