Lexical Meaning in Dialogic Language Use

Sebastian Feller

DIALOGUE STUDIES 9

John Benjamins Publishing Company

Lexical Meaning in Dialogic Language Use

Sebastian Feller
University of Münster

John Benjamins Publishing Company
Amsterdam / Philadelphia

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Feller, Sebastian.
Lexical meaning in dialogic language use / Sebastian Feller.
p. cm. (Dialogue Studies, ISSN 1875-1792 ; v. 9)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Semantics. 2. Dialogue analysis. I. Title.
P325.F38 2010
401'.43--dc22 2010034698
ISBN 978 90 272 1026 5 (Hb ; alk. paper)
ISBN 978 90 272 8754 0 (Eb)

John Benjamins Publishing Co. · P.O. Box 36224 · 1020 ME Amsterdam · The Netherlands
John Benjamins North America · P.O. Box 27519 · Philadelphia PA 19118-0519 · USA

Preface

The present work is a revised version of my doctoral thesis accepted by the Philosophical Department of the University of Muenster in the winter term 2009/10.

Choosing the thesis' topic was not difficult since language and especially meaning have always fascinated me. The fledgling interest that was already sparked at an early age grew into a serious main focus during my work at the Linguistic Department of the University of Muenster under Prof. Dr. Edda Weigand. This is where I increasingly became aquainted with the idea of language as something that people do. This idea was consolidated over many fruitful discussions in doctoral and graduate courses not only in the Linguistic but also the Philosophical Department. I began to develop an admiration for the later Wittgenstein's view of language as a social technique.

The present work takes much of its inspiration from Professor Weigand's scientific accomplishments and especially her knack of breaking new ground in the discipline. Her view of language as dialog has laid the path for my own work as a linguist. I am grateful for many stimulating discussions and her comments which helped me to broaden my perception. Furthermore, I want to express my gratitude to PD. Dr. habil Marion Grein for her second opinion and her helpful advice always keeping me on the right track.

I would like to thank my parents for their unconditional support and their constant belief in me.

Very special thanks go to my wife who never lost her patience with me and gave me the time I needed to complete my work. She is the one person who gives me the power to reach for the stars.

I dedicate this work to my wife and my parents.

Sebastian Feller
Muenster, July 2010

Table of contents

CHAPTER 1

The whole and its parts

1.1 Towards a holistic understanding of language

Human beings are social entities. We are a family member, a brother or a sister, a parent or a child, a husband or a wife. We bond with people that we call our acquaintances or even friends. Our everyday life is arranged according to a large number of social roles and relationships. There are teachers who lecture students, doctors who treat patients or waiters who serve customers. Social relationships help us manage our lives in an ever-changing, constantly challenging environment. Global warming, the growing shortage of natural resources or famine are some extreme cases in which the environment forces people to collaborate in order to find practical solutions to urgent problems.

Our daily routine is in fact full of situations in which we depend on cooperating with other people. If we feel ill we go and see the doctor. If our car breaks down, we call the mechanic. If we do not know where to find the eggs in the supermarket, we ask the staff for directions. All this would not be possible if it were not for one particular human asset: the ability to speak. Over millennia, language has developed into a powerful, highly advanced networking utility laying the foundation for human cooperation. Through language we coordinate our lives, balancing a whole range of variables corresponding with individual, social, natural and cultural factors (cf., for example, Levinson 2003; Weigand 2000, 2007).

Taking a closer look at how we communicate with each other, it becomes apparent that language use is similar to other things we do in many respects. Whereas some things happen by accident, such as spilling coffee over our shirt or stepping into warm dog excrement with our brightly polished shoes on, other things happen intentionally. For example, we mix eggs, flour and sugar into a dough, put the dough in a cake tin and heat everything up in the oven because we want to make a cake; we fill up the coffee maker with freshly ground coffee beans and water, plug it in and switch it on because we intend to enjoy our freshly made cake with a cup of hot coffee.

These kinds of activities can be generalized with a simple equation: when we do something intentionally, we seek to achieve ends by particular means; in other words, we carry out actions. And this is similar to what we do when we communicate with each other. We use specific communicative means to achieve

specific communicative ends. If we want somebody to close the door we can say "Close the door, please!". If we wish to know the time, we might enquire "What time is it?". We can say "Let me have a soda, please.", expecting the addressee to actually hand us a soda, and so forth. As Weigand (2006:86) notes in this context: "Communicative purposes and needs are therefore the key concepts for addressing human interaction. There is no alternative to considering language use as language action."

Another aspect is striking in this regard. Talking about speakers as social entities that communicate with each other, it is evident that language use is always dialogic in nature. It makes no sense to consider language only from the perspective of the speaker. In contrast, language use is inherently both action and reaction. It is a process of meaning and understanding between the communicative action of the speaker and the communicative reaction of the hearer.

Taking the perspective on language as language-in-use, it is obvious that the range of communicative means at hand is by far not as restricted as orthodox linguistic theories would suggest. Not hidden rules or strictly defined patterns guide the interaction of the interlocutors, but instead communicative interaction runs along the lines of conventions which are often bent or even overruled by ad hoc decisions and hypotheses. Speakers put to use a wide range of different abilities and integrate them into a complex language faculty. Along with verbal expressions, perceiving and cognizing are equally important for meaning and understanding (cf., for example, Weigand 2000:7). Recent neurobiological studies provide strong evidence for human integrated abilities. In this vein, Damasio (2003, 2005) argues that the traditional Cartesian separation of emotions and reason cannot be held up any longer. As his findings suggest, rational decisions are always intertwined with emotional states. We cannot switch off our gut instincts and think in purely logical terms. Reason and emotions go hand in hand from the very beginning. The same holds for language use, although many linguistic theories suggest we process language on independent levels, separating language into modules such as syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Recent neurobiological studies, however, show that speakers integrate all sorts of processing streams when computing language. Broca's area plays a special role here. In this context Müller & Basho (2004:334) contend:

> In conclusion, inferior frontal cortex is one of the likely and crucial sites of language acquisition because of its afferent convergence of audio-visuo-motor processing streams, which is a prerequisite for lexical learning. The role of inferior frontal cortex is further enhanced by its working memory capacity, which makes it indispensable during syntactic decoding and sentence generation.

We thus have to account for this complexity and abandon the traditional view of language as a modularized object. As Baker & Hacker (1986: 377) aptly surmise:

> The ability to speak English merges into such other abilities as social skills, memory, motor control, and the capacity to articulate knowledge clearly. It is a mistake to consider that mastery of a language is an ability which is sharply circumscribed and properly described independently of other abilities.

As an example, let us take a close look at the following short dialogs recalled from my own personal experience:

(1) A: "Would you like one?"
B: "Oh, this thing here is really big."
A: "Well, okay, maybe later then."

(2) A: "The phone is ringing."
B: "Well, I am watching my show now."
A: "Okay, I will get it then."

It is immediately evident that the sentences as such do not make much sense. In isolation, i.e., out of their real situational contexts, we cannot grasp what the speakers actually mean. In order to come to a proper understanding, we need to analyze the sentences within their 'natural circumstances':

(1) is part of a conversation that I had with a friend at a restaurant. I was pointing to an advertisement for ice cream on the restaurant's menu denoting that they sell two ice creams for the price of one. In this context, my friend immediately understood that by 'one' I referred to an ice cream. Answering the question, he pointed to the pizza on the plate in front of him. 'this thing here' had thus a clearly defined meaning for the two us. By inferring that he must believe the pizza would leave no room for a dessert, I took it that my friend had rejected my offer.

In (2), the situation was as follows: one night I was watching my favorite TV show when the phone suddenly rang. As I felt I had something better to do, I did not answer it right away. After a couple of rings my wife came into play. I took her remark (speaker A) as a request to answer the phone. In the same way she must have interpreted my reply as a polite way of saying no, as she finally answered the phone herself.

There can be little doubt that language use is more than just strings of words chained together. Quite obviously speakers apply many different abilities in communication. It is therefore more than surprising to me that orthodox linguistic theories dissect language into many separate parts and study them in isolation from each other. Consider Generativism, for example. The generativist isolates syntax from semantics and pragmatics and models language as if it were a formal

algebraic algorithm. Semantics is here only a supplementary module that is, just as pragmatics, added to the syntactic centrepiece (see also Chapter 2.4). However, reality paints a different picture. Baker & Hacker (1986: 385) hit the nail on the head:

> Modern dogmatism is damned for the same general reasons as its predecessor. Its roots are conceptual confusions and infatuation with preconceived pictures. The mystery of the 'creativity of language' expresses the fundamental misapprehension of understanding as a mental process whose mechanism must be brought to light. The insistence that speaking a language is closely analogous to operating a mathematical calculus manifests a misplaced faith in hidden system.

Corpus linguistics has partially confirmed this view. As Sinclair (cf. 1991: 109ff.) argues with regard to syntax and semantics, everything is mutually interwoven. Separating one from the other distorts what is really going on. Holistic linguistic theories like Weigand's Mixed Game Model (cf., for example, 2000) emphasize that linguistic theorizing needs to widen the perspective not only to the integration of syntax and semantics, but to the speaker as embedded in "cultural units which I call 'action games'" (2000: 6).

Some decades ago Martinet (1975) pointed out that the object of study ought not to be sacrificed to methodology. We must take into consideration the make up of the object we want to 'unclothe' if we are seeking for 'real' insights. Thus, it is the object that dictates methodology rather than vice versa.

These considerations are of not inconsiderable import for scientific conduct in general: The course of our research often leads us to accentuate and investigate particular elements of the whole object we study. Nevertheless, the integrity of the whole must have priority. Human beings can deal with the complexity that surrounds them (cf. Simon 1998, also Lumsden 1997 who both apply this idea to knowledge in the natural sciences). It is essential that filtering this complexity into parts must not result in crippling the natural object because we can never understand these parts without a proper understanding of the whole. Modularizing language into separate, autonomously defined units results in artificial and deficient views of language. We must be aware of the mutual interconnections that hold between the components and seek to protect the integrity of the object in its full complexity if we wish to differentiate ourselves from "doing cloud cuckoo land linguistics" (Harris 1997: 253).

With regard to linguistics specifically, there can be little doubt that these insights have a deep impact on our understanding of language and meaning. Ultimately, sign systems, formalistic calculus or truth conditional representations that were meant to explain language on the grounds of clear-cut categories and strictly rule-governed algorithms must be discarded. Meaning is not an independent

linguistic module filled with discrete meaning elements whatever they may be. With regard to decomposing word meaning into semantic primitives, Mihatsch (2006:9) comments:

> Da besonders konkrete Inhaltswörter stärker ganzheitlich und damit rechtshemisphärisch gespeichert werden, scheinen Propositionen oder Merkmalslisten psychologisch als Repräsentationsmodus für solche lexikalische Konzepte eher unplausibel zu sein. Lexikalische Bedeutung kann lediglich ad hoc sekundär in Merkmale zerlegt werden.
>
> (Since especially content words are more likely to be stored holistically in the right hemisphere, propositions or lists of semantic primitives seem rather implausible as a representative mode for such lexical concepts. Lexical meaning can only be separated ad hoc and ex post into semantic primitives.)

Recent findings in neurobiology (cf., for example, Müller & Basho 2004; Hickok & Poeppel 2007) point in a similar direction. The mental lexicon is definitely not filled with smallest invariant units of meaning. On the contrary, in the human mind, meaning takes the form of complex, i.e. globally processed and oftentimes fuzzy concepts (cf., for example, Labov 1973; Rosch 1973). Research on language learning has even revealed that speakers integrate motor-auditory-visual processing streams into language processing (cf., for example, Le Bel, Pineda & Sharma 2009).

Hence there can be little doubt that the view of meaning and understanding as a sort of rule-governed program with pre-fabricated in- and output is past its sell-by date. The picture is actually much broader than this. In order to arrive at an adequate understanding of language and meaning, we are in need of a theoretical framework that can cope with language as a natural object. In my opinion, the object of language can only be conceived properly from the standpoint of language-in-use, i.e., language as being used by the speaker. Austin (1962) and later Searle (1969) investigated language within its natural context of social action. For them, language is part of a purpose driven, social technique (cf. also de Souza Filho 1984; Weigand 2000:8ff.). The speaker embeds words in utterances that are used to carry out so-called speech acts. We do something with language: we ask questions, give commands, state requests, and so forth. This view traces back to the later Wittgenstein who defined language as part of what he called "life-form" (2001 [1953]:I, §23).

Relating these insights to the study of meaning, the ultimate question must be: what does the speaker use lexical expression for? Following Searle's (1969:31, 33) formula F(p) Weigand (1996) proposes that lexical expressions are generally used for predication. According to her, the predicative function of lexis can be defined "entweder als Aussagen machen über Objekte oder als Objekte

zueinander in Beziehung setzen, im Sinne der Prädikatenlogik also als ein- oder mehrstellige Prädikate" (either as making a statement about objects or as relating objects to each other, i.e., in the sense of predicate logic single or multi-figure predicates) (Weigand 1995:703). A detailed account of predication will follow in Chapter 3.3.

Following this idea, I base the present work on an understanding of meaning as part of language defined as social action. In the following, I will refer to this concept by 'meaning-in-use'. Meaning-in-use is the central piece of the present inquiry. In Chapter 3 this new concept will be explained in detail and it will be considered how it will actually help us to elucidate the issue of the lexical unit.

1.2 The aim of this work

Over time the field of theories of meaning has grown to a monstrous size. Research in lexical semantics is so hopelessly overloaded that it seems hard to ever bring order out of chaos. How meaning is defined and represented often springs from a vast range of diverging opinions and views. For example, anthropological linguistics (such as by Goodenough 1956; McKaughan & Austerlitz 1959; Tyler 1969) clings to the classic structural paradigm following de Saussure's (1985 [1916]) sign system. Adjacent we find the field of componential analysis which originated from the work of Trier (1973 [1931]). Later Fillmore (1971) took the German Word Field Theory as a starting point for Frame Semantics. Katz & Fodor (1964) worked on what they named 'markerese', i.e., a representation of a postulated subliminal cognitive level of meaning, serving as an explanation for syntagmatic combinations between words. Later, Lyons (1972, 1977, 1995) revised the classic structuralist approach. Instead of decomposing words into semantic primitives, he related words to each other via so-called sense relations. This opened the floodgates to a series of strictly logical approaches. Montague Grammar (Montague 1974), for example, attempted to reduce word meaning to logical connectives and quantifiers. With the arrival of cognitive linguistics, the tide turned once again. Berlin & Kay's (2000 [1969]) analyses of color terms prepared the ground for psychological linguistics. Here Rosch (1973) and Labov (1973) proposed a new model for categorization. Traditional, clear-cut categories on the basis of necessary and sufficient conditions were thrown over board and substituted for prototypes with fuzzy category boundaries. Jackendoff (1990) continued on the cognitive path. He based his meaning descriptions on stipulated conceptual primes which in part are reminiscent of predicative logic, in part of decomposition in the manner of classic Structuralism.

But even long before prototype theory and fuzzy set models there existed a number of alternative views that stand in direct opposition to clear-cut categories and strict logic. In *Untersuchung über die Deutlichkeit der Grundsätze der natürlichen Theologie und der Moral* (1912 [1764]:284), Kant concluded that in real life conversation meaning is not fixedly described but does only emerge from the particular communicative interaction between the interlocutors. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1907 [1836]:45f.) picked up this idea of language use as continuously evolving and fluctuant. In his view, each speaker interprets what a word means individually. For this reason, the interlocutors have to negotiate meaning every time anew. These relativistic understandings later cumulated in Wittgenstein's (2001 [1953]:I, §43) famous dictum "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" and were eventually resurrected many years later in Hundsnurscher & Splett's (1982) investigation of German adjectives. And the story goes on; limitations of space however force us to come to a halt here.

Needless to say, this overview of developments is only selective. A more detailed account of the matter will follow in Chapter 2. But my main point here has become clear: a unanimously accepted definition of meaning does not exist. And the issue gets even more controversial: when it comes to the other side of the coin, the expression side, things are the same: there are more opinions than people. Is meaning to be equated with single words or with strings of words? If we correlate it with more than one word, how many are to be included exactly and why so many and not one more or one less?

As already mentioned earlier I will tackle these problems from the perspective of language-in-use (see Chapter 3.1). The basic assumption here is that language use always means dialogic "language action" (Weigand 2006:86). The speaker uses specific communicative means to fulfill dialogically oriented communicative purposes.

Lexical expressions are used to predicate on the world, i.e., to construct and communicate an image of reality (see Chapter 3.3 for details). Thereby we must take into consideration that human beings are also individual beings with their own personal cognitive horizons. As Weigand (2006:88) argues, it is the human abilities that compose the semantic universe and structure predication:

> "In my view, which is confirmed by modern physics, there is no ontology independent of human beings. Reality exists in the eye of the observer. It is therefore not ontology which determines meaning but human beings' thinking."

And we must be aware of the fact that thinking might differ in many aspects from individual to individual. As a consequence we are to let go of the idea that meaning can be grasped in terms of pre-given, clear-cut definitions.

Against this backdrop the present work deliberates on these four questions:

- How can we represent the meaning side, i.e., predicative function of lexis?
- How can we define/demarcate the lexical unit?
- What about lexical ambiguity? Does it exist and, if yes, to what extent?
- What role does non-linguistic knowledge have in the lexicon?

Before we move on to pastures anew we will now take a look at state-of-the-art theories. A critical discussion of the various approaches to meaning will uncover a number of problematic aspects, offering some important implications for the present work. A closer look both at language-in-use and meaning-in-use will follow in Chapter 3. This includes a brief discussion of the 'encyclopedic knowledge controversy'. Opinions diverge greatly with regard to what non-linguistic knowledge is and whether or not it should be included in the lexicon and thus in lexical descriptions. Chapter 4 gives an account of methodological preliminaries, before certain ways-of-use of verbs are subjected to semantic analysis on the basis of predicating fields in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6 the analyzed units of expression will be contrasted with semantically related instances, arriving at a more fine-tuned semantic structure of the vocabulary. The lexical unit will thereby be defined in the process of both analyses. These will bring to light some important criteria regarding the definition of the lexical unit under the premise of meaning-in-use. As we shall see later on in detail, the subject-NP[1] will be of paramount importance in this regard.

1. In the following I will use NP as a short form for nominal phrase, VP for verbal phrase and PP for prepositional phrase.

CHAPTER 2

State-of-the-art theories

The following chapter gives a critical overview of semantic theories relevant for the present work. The main focus is thereby on the basic assumptions about language and their implications for the definition of meaning and the lexical unit. We will be dealing with a vast range of distinct views including classic Structuralism, psychological and cognitive theories, anthropological approaches, Generativism, quantitative and machine driven models along with use- and action-theoretical theories, to name a few examples.

Needless to say, this overview is far from exhaustive and is only a selective compilation with some important incentive with regard to the task ahead of us.

2.1 Structuralism

The early systematic approaches to semantics in the late 19th century are characterized by a strong tendency towards diachronic investigations of word meaning. As Geeraerts (2002: 24) puts it:

> [In] the overall nature of 19th century linguistics, the orientation is a diachronic one: what semantics is interested in, is change of meaning. Second, change of meaning is narrowed down to change of word meaning: the orientation is predominantly semasiological rather than onomasiological (...). Third, the conception of meaning is predominantly psychological, in a double sense. Lexical meanings are considered to be psychological entities, that is to say, (...) thoughts or ideas. Further, meaning changes (...) are explained as resulting from psychological processes. (...) A concept like metonymy is not just a linguistic concept, it is also a cognitive capacity of the human mind.

This 'historical' view focuses on the etymological development of words and their meanings. What a word means is not defined from a *hic-et-nunc* point of view but understood as the outcome of a continuous flux of semantic content throughout distinct developmental stages of a language. The main interest lies in comparative studies where word meaning is defined with regard to their lexical 'relatives' or 'ancestors' from related languages. This line of research is based on classics such as Sir William Jones' *Third anniversary discourse: 'On the Hindus'* (1993 [1786])

or Jacob Grimm's *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache* (1853), to name two famous representatives of this line of research. The main focus here was on the etymological relations between Indian Sanscrit, the Latin or Italic language family and Germanic related languages.

In the first half of the 20th century a completely new view of language emerged, sharing much of its inspiration and motivation with the works in phonology.

By analogy with the research by the Neogrammarians (including works by, e.g., Verner 1876, Paul 1995 [1880] and Sievers 1876) and, later, the Prague school of phonology around Trubetzkoy (1971 [1939]) and Jakobson (1974, 1978), Ferdinand de Saussure established a new linguistic position, still known to us today under the label 'Structuralism'. In his *Cours de linguistique générale* (1985 [1916]), he developed a definition of language as sign system. de Saussure restricts the linguistic investigation to the level of "langue", an idealized and exclusively synchronic model of language which abstracts from the imprecise dialects and flaws involved in real-time speech production. The meaning of each element, i.e., each linguistic sign is determined by its relations to the other signs of the system. de Saussure construes each sign as bi-lateral, consisting of an expression side and a meaning side. Although he construes the meaning side as a concept-like, psychological entity in the mind of the speaker, his approach is still far off from a truly mentalist conception of meaning. Rather we are dealing here with a vague and intuitive foreshadowing of the 'mental concept' of modern cognitive linguistic theories (see Chapter 2.5 for a more detailed account). In the end it is the oppositional relations, i.e., the similarities and differences between the signs of the system that the Saussurian notion of meaning is anchored in. This idea persists throughout most of 20th century linguistic reasoning.

One offshoot of the structuralist paradigm is Word Field Theory. Trier (1973 [1931]), for example, proposed word fields that comprise synonymous expressions structured along conceptual domains. The members of a single field are believed to share at least one semantic element, usually even more than just one. They have a common reference range marked off by a collective hypernym. For example, color terms such as 'green', 'blue' and 'red' belong to the field 'color'. 'father', 'mother' and 'child' may be merged to a field 'family', and so forth. Reuning (1941) extended word field analysis to a comparative 'meta-field' dimension that shows how word fields of different languages sometimes grade into each other. German and English fields of pleasurable emotions, for example, are measured along semantic dimensions like intensity and dynamics. The results are represented by rating scales that are meant to exhibit the semantic commonalities and idiosyncrasies of the particular languages. In addition, Lehrer (1974) widened the range of sense relations. In her view, it is not only synonymy which shapes lexical fields. Instead, she argued that polysemy, lexical gaps and peripheral members,

among others, play an equally important role. Weisgerber (1963) went even so far as to stipulate syntactic fields itemizing sentence patterns. These are supposed to complement lexical fields with the aim of providing a more complete picture of a language's structure.

The methodology behind field theory became a primary instrument in anthropological linguistics. Goodenough (1956), Mc Kaughan (1959), Lounsbury (1956) and Tyler (1969), among others, based much of their sociolinguistic research on word fields and word families. Within this framework it is especially hierarchically ordered systems such as kin terms, age-classes and forms of address that are subjected to analysis.

In the late 20th century Word Field Theory revived, especially in the work by Geckeler and Coseriu (for a comprehensive overview of the developments in field theory see Coseriu & Geckeler 1981). Coseriu (1967), for example, introduced the concept of 'lexical solidarity'. Similar to 'lexical restrictions' in Transformational Grammar, it describes the syntagmatic behavior of a word. Coseriu basically distinguishes between three different types of solidarity: 'affinitive', 'selectional' and 'implicative'. Affinitive solidarity means that a specific semantic class determines the semantic content of a single word in the way that, for instance, 'human being' defines the meaning of the verb 'to eat'. As a consequence this mutual semantic relationship counts as an intra-linguistic elucidation of the co-occurrences of the class members and the defined word. In the same way, selectional solidarity highlights the semantic interconnection between an archilexeme and a word. The verb 'to sit', for example, is determined by the superordinate term 'seating' including words such as 'stool', 'chair', 'sofa', and so forth. Implicative solidarity is in effect if it is a lexical expression that determines another word. The verb 'run' is accordingly defined by the prepositional phrase 'with/on legs'. This semantic demarcation marks off the set of conceivable candidates that can possibly co-occur with the *definiendum*.

Be that as it may, some severe limitations in explanatory power show that field theory is not a very promising path. Color terms, for example, pose serious problem. Within the word field framework, 'green', for instance, is only definable as 'not red', 'not blue', 'not yellow', and so forth. A positive definition of the word is missing. Geckeler (1973) assumes such expressions to be special case phenomena which he supposes to be structured beyond the structuring principles of word fields. But in the long run he (1993) himself admits that Word Field Theory meets its limits.

Another branch of the structuralist paradigm evolved under the field of Decomposition. In *Prolegomena zu einer Sprachtheorie* (1974 [1943]), Hjelmslev laid the foundation for the Copenhagen school of Glossematics. He proposed a semantic analysis that aims at breaking down single words into primitive meaning