

Ling115: Semantics I

The Empirical Domain of Semantics

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Grammar ^{1/3}

- In modern linguistics, a grammar is viewed as a set of abstract devices, rule systems and principles that serve to characterize the well-formed sentences of a language.

- (1) I ate lunch with him. ⇒ well-formed, grammatical
- (2) * Lunch with ate I him. ⇒ ill-formed, ungrammatical

Cf. a formal language like html:

```
<meta name="description" content="Die Webseite  
von Prof. Maribel Romero an der Uni Konstanz.">
```

Grammar ^{2/3}

- Descriptive grammar vs. prescriptive grammar:

(1) John doesn't wanna eat.

- Grammaticality vs. processing difficulty:

(2) The mouse the cat the kid likes caught escaped.

The mouse escaped.

The mouse the cat caught escaped.

The mouse the cat the kid likes caught escaped.

Grammar ^{3/3}

- Grammars of natural languages are psychologically real, they are in our minds, they are part of our cognitive systems.

Linguistic competence

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Linguistic performance

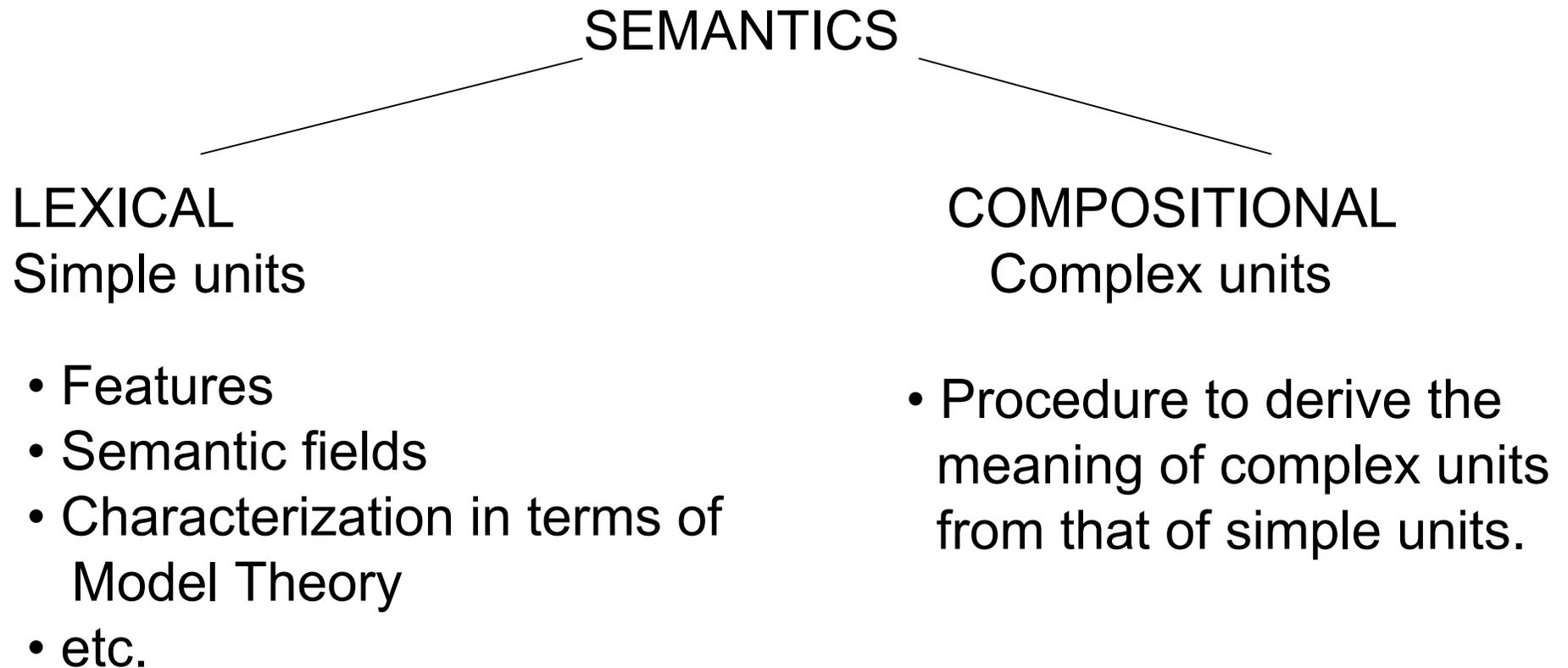
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Semantic knowledge ^{1/5}

- The meaning of a complex expression does not only depend on its lexical units but also on the way these are **combined** syntactically and phonologically.
- (1) a. The panic among the visitors caused a stampede.
b. A stampede caused the panic among the visitors.
- (2) a. I only gave ANNA a book. ⇒ “Nur Anna”
b. I only gave Anna a BOOK. ⇒ “Nur ein Buch”

Semantic knowledge ^{2/5}



Semantic knowledge ^{3/5}

- Semantic knowledge is **productive**: we understand the meaning of new sentences that we have not heard before.

(1) I saw a pink whale in the parking lot.

Cf. adding two numbers you have not added before:

(2) $1437,952 + 21,84$

Semantic knowledge ^{4/5}

- Knowledge of the meaning of the lexical units and of the combination procedure is by and large **unconscious** (as opposed to that in arithmetic operations).
- Example 1: German *ja*
 - (1) Joventut de Badalona hat **ja** den ULEB Pokal gewonnen.

Semantic knowledge ^{5/5}

- Example 2: *weil* and *denn*

QUESTION: Compare the meaning of (a) and (b):

- (1) a. Die Straße ist sehr naß, **denn** es hat viel geregnet.
b. Die Straße ist sehr naß, **weil** es viel geregnet hat.
- (2) a. Es hat viel geregnet, **denn** die Straße ist sehr naß.
b. Es hat viel geregnet, **weil** die Straße sehr naß ist.

