Eksamensoppgave i ENG3510 Semantikk (7,5 sp)

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Examination paper for ENG3510 Topics in Semantics (7,5 sp)

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   Collins Cobuild Dictionary
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There are four questions. Answer all parts of all questions. Each question counts equally in determining the final grade.

**Question 1. Word meanings**

(i) It is often said that human languages do not tolerate exact synonyms. Discuss the pair of words in (1), why they might be thought to be synonyms or partial synonyms, and how semantic differences between them might be brought to light. You may refer to the examples in (2) in your answer.

(1) _precise, accurate_

(2) a. a precise instrument, an accurate instrument  
   b. precise information, accurate information  
   c. They arrived at precisely the same moment.  
   d. * They arrived at accurately the same moment.  
   e. His description was accurate but imprecise.  
   f. Her watch may be very precise, but unfortunately it is not accurate.

(ii) The same word or different words? Discuss the distinction between _lexical polysemy_ and _accidental homonymy_, and how the distinction may be drawn.

**Question 2. Inference and context**

(i) Explain briefly the distinction between linguistic meaning and speaker meaning, and the notion of _conversational implicature._

(ii) Below are two invented exchanges.

(1) _Fiona:_ Is Eric at work today?  
    _Julia:_ His moped is outside the office.

(2) _Harold:_ Were all the replies positive?  
    _Julia:_ Most of them were.

In each case, analyse Julia’s reply using Grice’s conversational maxims and the cooperative principle. Your analysis should include

- a likely implicature of Julia’s response,
- contextual information or assumptions that support the implicature, and
- an outline of the reasoning leading to the implicature.
Question 3. Truth, logic, reasoning

(i) In both (1) and (2), the b-sentence follows from the a-sentence. That is, if an utterance of the a-sentence is accepted as true, then the truth of the b-sentence is also accepted. Explain briefly why (2b) is treated as a presupposition of (2a), while (1b) is treated as an entailment of (1a).

(1) a. The tortoise is asleep.
   b. The tortoise is asleep or it is dead.

(2) a. The tortoise is asleep.
   b. There exists a tortoise which the speaker is referring to.

(ii) If speaker B responds to speaker A as in (3), speaker A is likely to infer that speaker B believes that Fred is not going to pass his driving test. This can be accounted for in terms of patterns of reasoning (e.g. modus ponens or modus tollens). Explain how, by stating which pattern is involved and providing an explicit analysis of the logical form of the inference, i.e. its premises and conclusion.

(3) A: I wonder if Fred is going to pass his driving test.
   B: If Fred is going to pass his driving test, then pigs can fly.

Question 4. Quantifiers and negation

(i) For each of the predicate logic formulae in (1)-(3), provide an English sentence whose meaning might be represented by it. Discuss whether any of two of these are synonymous.

(1) \( \neg \exists x ( \text{STUDENT}(x) \land \text{SMOKES}(x) ) \)
(2) \( \neg \forall x ( \text{STUDENT}(x) \rightarrow \text{SMOKES}(x) ) \)
(3) \( \forall x ( \text{STUDENT}(x) \rightarrow \neg \text{SMOKES}(x) ) \)

(ii) The English sentence (4) is ambiguous. The two meanings of (4) might be analysed using simplified predicate logic formulae as in (5) and (6), where the variable \( x \) ranges over participants and \( y \) ranges over competitions.

(4) Someone cheated in every competition.
(5) \( \exists x ( \forall y ( \text{CHEATED-IN}(x,y) ) ) \)
(6) \( \forall y ( \exists x ( \text{CHEATED-IN}(x,y) ) ) \)

- Describe in words the ambiguity of (4) in terms of the relative scope of the quantifiers.
- Describe a situation which could disambiguate (4), i.e. a situation which the sentence could truthfully describe one of its meanings but not the other. (Be sure to state which meaning your situation describes.)

(iii) The sentence in (7) is not, in normal contexts, felt to be ambiguous. Explain why this should be so, and identify the reading that the example has.

(7) A fool is born every minute.