SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

Lecture 3

Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Relations

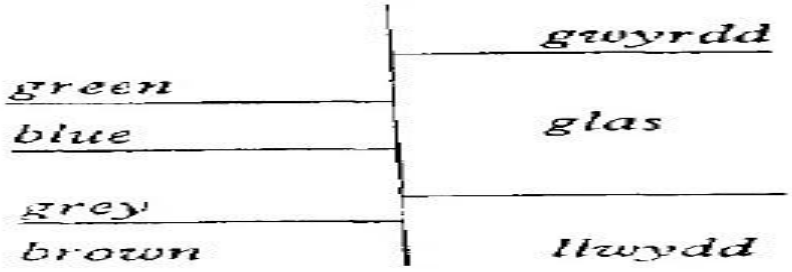
Paradigmatic relations are those into which a linguistic unit enters through being contrasted or substitutable, in a particular environment, with other similar units. (vertical relation)
Syntagmatic relations are those into which a linguistic unit enters by its co-occurrence with other units. (horizontal relation)

e.g.
"a red door"
"a green door"
In this example, "red" and "green" are in a paradigmatic relation to each other.
"Red" and "green" are also in a syntagmatic relation with "door".

Semantic Fields

Words in a language can be grouped and classified into different semantic fields.
A semantic field contains a group of words which are related in their meaning.
For example, the words "Saturday", "Sunday", "Monday".. etc. belong to one semantic field which we can call "days of the week".
When we look at semantic fields we are concerned with paradigmatic relations between words.

• A word can be part of more than one semantic field. For example, the word "whale" can be a member of the following semantic fields: "living creatures", "animals" and "sea animals".
• Semantic fields can be useful to compare a single language at two different time periods, or to compare two languages to see the way in which they divide up a particular field.



This is a comparison of a single dimension of the color system between English and literary Welsh. We notice that English has more color terms to divide up this particular semantic field.

There are many other similar examples. For instance, if we look at the words for noise in a Mexican language, we find that there are six 'noise' words: referring to children yelling, people talking loudly, people arguing, people talking angrily, increasing noise and funeral noise.
Similarly, in Arabic we have a lot of words like "*klas*" and "*shishi*" that divide up the semantic field of "dates".

In all these examples we have a list of words referring to items of a particular class dividing up a semantic field.
In almost all of these cases, moreover, the words are incompatible. We cannot say for example, "This is a red hat" and of the same object "This is a green hat." Also, a creature cannot be described both as a "lion" and as an "elephant" at the same time.

The incompatibility of terms within a semantic field is often clearly indicated in language.
e.g. It was on Saturday that she went there.
This sentence implies that she did not go there on Monday or any other day of the week (but not that she did not go there in August). The words "Saturday" and "Monday" are incompatible because they divide up the semantic field of "days of the week" in English.

We can, however, recognize terms that seem to be mixtures.
For example, a hat can be orange-red. But by introducing such terms we merely increase the words within the field, and divide the field up more finely. So instead of just having color terms like "red", "green", "blue" and "orange", the semantic field of the color system will include color terms like " red-green", "orange-red".. etc.

In some cases the distinction between the terms in a semantic field is clear, and reflected by clear distinctions in experience; this is the case, with few exceptions, with animal names. So, the distinction between "rabbit" and "tiger" is very clear.
In other cases, e.g. the Mexican 'noise' words we discussed earlier, the distinctions are far more blurred.

Generally, too, the items in a semantic field are 'unordered'. In other words, there is no natural way, as far as their meaning is concerned, of arranging them in any kind of order. If we wanted to list them we should probably do so in alphabetical order.

But there are some groups of words that seem to have some 'order'. For example, the days of the week and the months of the year form sets of ordered incompatible items.
We cannot say for instance:
"This month is November and it is also March."
This group of words, however, have sequential relations such that Sunday comes immediately before Monday, and Monday before Tuesday.. etc.

Another example of semantic fields that have members that can have "natural order" is the case of measurement units such as inch, foot and yard which can be put in order, starting from the smallest one.
The numerals one, two, three, etc., are another obvious example.
