

Key Points from Dr. Dina M. Hammouri's Semantics

1. Definition of Semantics

- "Semantics is the study of meaning." (Lyons, 1977)
- It focuses on understanding meaning in language, encompassing words, phrases, sentences, and larger discourse units like texts. (Hurford & Heasley, 1983; Lobner, 2002)
- "In linguistics, semantics is the subfield that is devoted to the study of meaning at the levels of words, phrases, sentences, and larger units of discourse (termed texts, or narratives)." (Wikipedia)

2. Importance of Semantics

- Ensures clear communication, avoiding misunderstandings, e.g., "I see my father every day" versus "I sea my father every day."
- Helps form coherent sentences that convey the intended meaning, e.g., "A boy has eaten a sandwich" (correct) vs. "A sandwich has eaten a boy" (incorrect).
- Allows flexible expression; similar phrases can convey the same meaning, e.g., "The sky is blue" or "I see a blue sky."
- Explains structural ambiguity: e.g., "The chicken is ready to eat" could mean the chicken is ready to be served or that the chicken itself is ready to eat.
- Highlights how word meanings change over time, e.g., "nice" once meant "foolish," and "silly" used to mean "happy."

3. Types of Meaning

Conceptual Meaning (Denotative/Literal):

The basic, literal meaning of a word as found in a dictionary. For instance, "needle" means a "thin, sharp, steel instrument."

Associative Meaning (Connotative):

The associations or emotions that people attach to a word, which may vary. For example, "needle" may be associated with "pain," "illness," or "drugs."

Connotations can be positive, negative, or neutral, and may be cultural or personal.

Examples:

- Conceptual Meaning:
 - "Blood": The red liquid flowing in the body.
 - "Pig": An animal with a broad nose and short tail.
- Associative Meaning:
 - "Blood": Can connote "accident," "killing," or "sacrifice."
 - "Pig": May have cultural connotations like "dirty" or "illegal meat."