

# HEWSON'S SEMANTIC THEORY AND IMPLICIT SEMANTICS

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## ABSTRACT

*The problem of implicit semantics was approached in this paper with a broad understanding of presuppositions, implications, entailments, etc., as derivable information created by three different kinds of contexts in the four stages of meaning generation. Liens are viewed as meanings implied by the speaker and/or inferred by the hearer in a real act of communication. As meaning generation is assumed to be an activity, liens are consequently treated as dynamic processes involving psychological associations, rational deductions, and imagination. Each stage of semiogenesis provides a potential possibility for a variety of liens. Most of them are dismissed and cancelled at the subsequent stages of meaning generation so that the final perceptive product—an understood utterance—appears to have only several liens which remain relevant for a given set of linguistic, referential and situational contexts and for the majority of the speakers.*

1. John Hewson's ideas on semantics, which permeate his works, appear to have a considerable explanatory potential applicable to a number of semantic issues. The following is a brief outline of his semantic teaching and an attempt to demonstrate how it can be employed in the treatment of problems pertaining to implicit semantics.

1.1 Hewson's theory of meaning is based on Saussure's distinction of *langue* and *parole*, or tongue and discourse, and elaborates the view that the use of language is an activity 'whereby the underlying elements of a tongue are processed, albeit subconsciously, for use in discourse' (Hewson 1990: 27). The meaning of discourse elements is a product of semiogenesis, i.e., it is generated in four consecutive stages: sememe, alloseme, reference, and truth.

The *sememe* (the other terms for it are *concept* and *underlying signifi- cate*) is an invariant underlying meaning related to *langue* as a structure. The sememe, which is acquired by a person in the course of cognitive development and is permanently stored in the memory, 'permits or determines the range of meanings (or *allosemes*) of any one term in discourse' (Hewson 1990: 7). At least a part of its value is received by a sememe from its systemic relationship to other concepts, e.g., 'The colour we call *green* in English is limited in the spectrum by the colours which we call *yellow*

and *blue*' (Hewson 1990: 8). The sememe is not an empirical but a theoretical element, and is revealed through the usage of its *allosemes*, or surface meanings. The relationship between the sememe and allosemes parallels that between phonemes and their allophones: the sememe is a theoretical construct that permits or determines the production of allosemes (Hewson 1990: 8).

The next stage of meaning—*reference*—is generated when elements of tongue are used in speech to relate some information about the world (either physical or mental, including imaginary reality). Reference is the relationship between a fragment of the world and a language sign. 'It is reference to the world of experience, whether in the here and now, or in memory, including the memory of the race, as in recorded history.' (Hewson 1990: 43).

The final product of semiogenesis is *truth*. It reflects correspondence of the sentence to the state of affairs known to the speaker or hearer in a particular context. Truth, according to Hewson (1995: 419) is always variable, relative, context and situation dependent.

1.2 Hewson remarks that the meaning of a sentence must be determined by linguistic context and communicative situation (Hewson 1990: 53), and without them sentences do not have any propositional meaning or truth values. Take, for example, (1):

(1) I brought the paper.

If this sentence had a propositional meaning, it could mean either that I brought a newspaper, a document to be signed or the paper I was going to read at a conference, or even a daily supply of copier paper. The translation of (1) into another language may require at least four different propositions which proves that (1) does not have a single surface meaning without a context, i.e., no proposition (Hewson 1990: 53). We can not equate propositional meaning to reference either, because (1) will have a different reference when used on two different days (a different issue of the newspaper on the second day) or by two different speakers (the referent of 'I' will be different) (Hewson 1990: 52).

1.3 Semiogenesis Theory reflects the stratification of language structure. It appears that grammatical morphemes are associated only with sememes, and can not have any other type of meaning. For example, *-s*, *-en*, *-ren* in English are markers of the concept of 'more than one', yet do not have any allosemes (say, 'more than three' etc.) or reference. Words have an underlying meaning in tongue and any number of allosemes in dis-

course but words lack reference unless used in combination with other words in a sentence. Nor do they have a truth value, which can only be determined for a sentence in a particular definite context which turns a sentence into an utterance, i.e., into a unit of discourse.

1.4 Thus the semantics of a sentence is a complex phenomenon comprising all the four stages of semiogenesis, and can be properly analysed only in the context of its usage. Traditionally, two kinds of context are distinguished—the linguistic context, such as a sentence for a word or a text for a sentence, and the situational context (time, place of the communication, participants, physical or social environment, the cultural matrix) (Hewson 1990: 54). Meanwhile, an act of communication involves no less than two situations. One of them is the communicative situation in the above sense, and the other is a situation which is being discussed (reported, referred to) in communication. I shall refer to the latter type of situation as *referential situation*. Any communication involves exchange of information about something, about some part of the real or imaginary world, some fact, event or situation. It may coincide with the communicative situation, or may be located far from it both in time and space.

Imagine that this afternoon you are telling your colleague about an argument you had with your spouse in the morning. That incident, the topic of the conversation, is a *referential situation*, a situation you are referring to. In this case it is different from the communicative situation, as they are separated both in time and space. They are also different in the composition of the participants: the communicative situation involves you and your colleague, while the referential situation involved you and your disgruntled half. Though the communicative situation and the referential situation may coincide, e.g., when communicants are talking about what they are observing or discussing their very conversation, often these situations create two distinct kinds of contexts. It is the referential situation that creates the third type of context, namely, the *referential context*. The principal difference between the two kinds is that the situational context created by the communicative situation is always real, while the referential context may involve an imaginary, or past situation when people discuss unreal, future or past developments, actions, facts, etc.

2. Let us now see how the above ideas by Hewson (with a slight modification concerning the third type of context) can be applied to the problems of implicit semantics. In order to do that, we will have to abandon the prevailing approach to implicit semantics based on logic and truth conditions. That approach generally limits the variety and abundance of information

derived and derivable from an utterance to a few specific cases of presuppositions and entailments (logical conclusions) and apparently fails to explain such ordinary cases of communication as the famous conversation between two strangers, a motorist (2) and a pedestrian (3):

- (2) I ran out of petrol.  
 (3) There is a filling station around the corner.

Obviously, (3) contains a logical entailment (*There is a corner*) but this does not tell much of how and why the pedestrian interpreted (2) as a request for help and came forward with it without even a feeble attempt to verify the truth of the motorist's sentence.

2.1 In view of some other apparent restrictions and inadequacies of the logical approach to implicit semantics noted and discussed by a number of linguists (Sandt 1988, Eco 1988, Hewson 1995), I would like to propose a different treatment of the nature and mechanisms of implicit semantics as a complex activity which comprises and combines both logical and associative thinking. It begins either with an entailment (a logical conclusion) or with psychological associations. The term *association* is used here in its common terminological sense as 'a connection (usually learned) between two or more mental elements such as ideas, thoughts, images, or percepts; also the element that is evoked when an associated element is active' (Sutherland 1995: 37). 'When one thing is perceived or recalled, it is usually followed by the recall of another thing which is like it, different from it, or accompanied by it in the original experience' (Kemp 1985: 77). I presume that these psychological associations trigger a process of generating implicit semantics. The term *lien*<sup>1</sup> will subsequently be used as a generic notion to denote various units of implicit semantics which participate in utterance perception. The working definition of such a unit is given in (4):

- (4) A *lien* is information which *may* be created and/or determined by any kind of context at each stage of meaning generation.

Thus in my understanding *liens* are semantic elements which are analysable and available to most speakers of a certain language. They cover the notions of presuppositions, implicatures and inferences, as well as logical entailments, and are the building blocks of *implicit semantics*. The word 'may' in definition (4) reflects the fact that an utterance contains information implied by the speaker (implicatures) or inferred by the hearer (inferences), but both the speaker and the hearer are not necessarily aware

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<sup>1</sup> The term was suggested to me by Phil Branigan.

of all of those implicatures and inferences which can be revealed in logical and linguistic analyses. The uncertainty of the definition could also account for the cases when the speaker fails to deliver his/her message, i.e., when the hearer fails to recognise the speaker's implications, or makes inferences which were not implied by the speaker. Thus I claim that implicit semantics stemming from meaningful associations is a cognitive potentiality which depends on the contexts and the stages of semiogenesis.

We can consequently speak of different types of linguistic *liens* depending on the psychological mechanism that participates in their emergence: implicational, associative, and projecting. Implicational *liens* are produced when a linguistic sign or linguistic signs cause the addressee to make a logical conclusion about the existence of something. Associative *liens* start with an association caused by a linguistic sign but may also be followed by a logical conclusion. Projecting *liens* comprise either an implication and/or an association based on past experience (knowledge) about possible future developments.

2.2 With such understanding of implicit semantics, we can now correlate different types of *liens* with Hewson's stages of semiogenesis. First let us consider the function and effects of the three types of context in generating implicit information. Different contexts outlined above can actualise, or produce, *liens* which otherwise are only dormant possibilities, or potentialities. For example, (5) does not normally presuppose (6), and (6) seems to be absolutely false:

- (5) Genghis Khan conquered many European cities.
- (6) Genghis Khan conquered London.

However, a particular context can make (6) a very probable inference, e.g., a *referential* context of a rock group by the name *Genghis Khan* on a successful tour of Europe, or a horror novel based on historical fantasies. The referential and the situational contexts produce, as a rule, different kinds of associations, and, consequently, different kinds of *liens*. For example, (7) may have the following (8-11) *liens* due to a particular referential context, i.e., depending on the topic of the preceding conversation:

- (7) Pat is another Genghis Khan.
- (8) Pat's political views are not left-wing.
- (9) Pat is a great leader of Mongolia.
- (10) Pat is a fearsome and aggressive person.
- (11) Pat spends most of his time riding a horse and fighting.

The *situational* context (that is, the speaker's and hearer's personalities and outlooks) determines the correct *lien* for (7) as either (12) or (13):

- (12) The speaker has a high opinion of Pat.  
 (13) The speaker has a low opinion of Pat.

If the hearer is an enthusiast of strong physical exercise and leadership qualities, s/he will presume (12). If s/he is sceptical about it, s/he will most likely conclude (13). In the same conversation the participants may select both the *liens* (12) and (13). The *linguistic* context creates conditions which allow the hearer to identify every word of the utterance as belonging to a certain grammatical class, and make preliminary conclusions about its underlying meaning if the word is new to him/her. Consider (14):

- (14) Tom was sitting with a bottle of *Plzen* and a plate of *knedliki* in front of him.

We are certainly able to infer (15-16) due to the linguistic context alone (because we are not given the other two contexts except the past time of the referential context).

- (15) *Plzen* is a drink  
 (16) *Knedliki* is a kind of food.

Such anticipatory *liens* facilitate the acquisition of the explanations which often follow a foreign word borrowed to denote cultural realities of another country until they become assimilated by the languages (cf. *burritos*, *sushi*, *taboo*, *wiener*, *pundit*, etc.).

2.3 We can thus conclude that every context type (linguistic, referential, and situational) creates conditions for the emergence of associations and resulting *liens* which may or may not be realised and recognised by the recipient of the speech. Now we are in a position to analyse the relationship between different stages of semiogenesis and *liens*.

2.3.1 Sememe and *liens*. The linguistic context determines the sememe of a particular word in a sentence or text. Thus it is the linguistic environment (the dog's and the human name) alone that activates the seme 'owner' in (17) and 'academic degree' in the word *master* in (18):

- (17) Rover brought his master's paper.  
 (18) Roger brought his Master's paper.

The immediate context specifies the grammatical properties of the lexical entries or specifies the particular lexical meaning of a word and, consequently, creates *specifying liens*. They are created by psychological associations which may be further subdivided into syntagmatic and paradigm-

matic. Syntagmatic associations provide access to a number of phrases and expressions in which the word in question is frequently used. Paradigmatic associations create *liens* which enable speakers to derive the meaning of new words, such as *Euroshima*, *Irangate*, and to grammatically process them, i.e., to parse them, to anticipate the forms of the paradigms.

The sememe also makes possible implicational *liens*, such as (19) for (18):

(19) Roger is a graduate student.

Such *liens*, usually called entailments, are part of the lexical meaning of a word, or part of the concept, and are derived from the sentences thanks to the specifying effect of the linguistic context. Both (17) and (18) in this paper are given without any contexts, yet the *lien* of (19) is unambiguous and comprehensive, i.e., valid for any speaker of English.

2.3.2 Alloseme and *liens*. The surface meaning gets its specifications in a linguistic context, as in (20-22):

(20) Roger brought his Master's paper.

(21) Roger brought his master key.

(22) Roger brought his master plan.

The linguistic context at this stage functions as *restricting* rather than specifying which was the case with the sememe. It eliminates a variety of possible surface meanings created by the seme in favour of one or two allosemes appropriate for a given linguistic context. This context at the same time gives rise to a number of associative *liens* based on the hearer's experience, such as (23-26) for (19), i.e., for the sentence *Roger is a graduate student*:

(23) Roger lives on campus.

(24) He often visits a gym and keeps fit.

(25) He is merry and rowdy / tired and depressed.

(26) He is shy and intellectual, i.e., the surface meaning *a graduate student* brings forth features and properties which are stereotypically associated with young males going to school.

The referential context further restricts allosemic *liens* created by the linguistic context. For the examples above, the referential context will unequivocally dismiss all the *liens* for the sentence (19) *Roger is a graduate student* except (23) if the discussion dealt with the topic of looking for roommate; (24) will fit perfectly into the topic of men's lifestyles and gaining weight after graduating and finding a regular job; only (25) will be

valid for the referential context of a conversation on the habits of the younger generation while *lien* (26) will naturally arise in response to the topic of personal qualities of a potential employee. At the same time the referential context creates *liens* which deal with the speaker's and hearer's attitudes towards the utterance and its subject matter and their knowledge about it.

**2.3.3 Reference and *liens*.** The next stage of meaning generation involves reference to a particular situation. At this stage a number of *liens* may appear. They are caused by the interlocutors' knowledge about that particular referential situation. Supposing the same example (18) *Roger brought his Master's paper* is used in the referential situation 'The (Dis)Advantages of Going to School', we can claim that reference may produce the following *liens*:

- (27) Roger Smith is a graduate student (caused by sememic linguistic context).
- (28) Like many grad students, he is merry and rowdy (caused by allosemantic referential context).
- (29) Roger is happy because he has written his major paper.
- (30) He likes working at nights and sleeping in the daytime.
- (31) He now has plenty of time to go out.
- (32) The speaker is happy to have Roger as her/his friend

In the preceding examples, sentences (29)-(32) are based on the information which is available to the speaker and hearer due to their knowledge of a Roger Smith, and are caused by reference. In other words, once reference is made to a particular person, all the properties and features associated with that person and the facts of his life may potentially invoke associations and subsequent conclusions, i.e., *liens*. On the other hand, *lien* (32) is determined entirely by the communicative context and the hearer's knowledge about the speaker's attitudes and feelings towards the mentioned person. As in the previous examples, reference and referential situation at the same time eliminate quite a number of *liens* created by different contexts at the allosemantic stage. A reference to a particular person (Roger Smith, the speaker's roommate who is scared by the prospect of looking for a job) will certainly eliminate *lien* (29) and will probably make (30) and (31) irrelevant.

**2.3.4 Truth and *liens*.** The truth value, both negative and positive, directs the hearer to search for the *liens* which fit the utterance in the particular referential and situational context. Suppose my employer remarks:

- (33) Roger is still a graduate student.

This sentence is not true in the referential context because I know as well as my boss that Roger is a recent graduate and is employed full-time. It seems that the truth value of this utterance becomes problematic only if we take into consideration the first stage of meaning generation, i.e., the sememe, the lexical meaning of the word 'student'. Then (33) will have a negative truth value. However, I don't think I will misunderstand my boss's statement because I am capable of inferring the metonymic associations (34-35) generated at the stage of the alloseme, i.e., a *lien* similar to (30-31):

- (34) Grad students like working at night and are drowsy in the mornings.  
 (35) Students are just learning things.

With this *lien* which has a positive truth value, sentence (33) may also be said to have a positive truth value in the sense (36) or (37):

- (36) Even though Roger is employed, he never got rid of his student habits.  
 (37) Roger is not efficient in doing his work yet as he is still learning.

When the truth of the sememic stage is negative, there may be true *liens* derived at the following stages, and they will make the utterance true for a certain context. Imagine my colleague Roger saying (38) on a Friday evening after he got an invitation to a student party:

- (38) I am a grad student tonight/till tomorrow.

Here the linguistic context ('tonight/till tomorrow') creates the understanding that he feels like a student. Another possible interpretation is that Roger is going to behave like a student tonight. This understanding is created at the sememic level where the word 'student' presupposes a relatively permanent state, while the modifier of time 'tonight' creates the *lien* that Roger is not really a student which can even be inferred by an outsider who does not know Roger.

Now imagine that Roger says (38), without specifying the period, to an attractive girl who made enquiries about him and has no doubts about his social status. The situational and referential contexts will make her conclude that:

- (39) Roger is lying to her.  
 (40) He wants to be taken for a student, etc.

In other cases when a person utters information (other than about her/himself) which the hearer believes to be not true, a most natural conclusion is:

(41) The speaker does not know that X

where X is the true statement. It may be followed by the *liens* similar to those of (39-40), and conditioned by the situational context.

We can thus conclude that the truth value of the sentence often causes a rebound, a return back to the previous stages of meaning generation in order to find a *lien* which will make the utterance true. The return back to the earlier stages of meaning generation necessarily requires more time and effort. For that reason this strategy is not among the most popular in everyday communication.

3. The preceding explanations allow us to presume that implicit semantics is a dynamic process producing *liens*, or derivable information. They are created by contexts at different stages of meaning generation as proposed by Hewson. The contexts seem to be hierarchically organized, so that the linguistic context specifies a variety of *liens* which are sorted out and for the most part eliminated by the referential context which, in its turn, creates *liens* of its own level. These are cancelled by the situational context which leaves only a very limited number of interpretations at the highest stage of meaning generation. The discrepancy between the truth of an utterance and reality causes an appeal to the previously bypassed *liens* until a satisfactory explanation is found to make the statement true in the particular referential and situational contexts. *Liens* may be described by two parameters: the stages of meaning generation (sememic, allosemic, reference and truth) and the context of their emergence (linguistic, referential, and situational).

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