

The Semantics of Verbs 'sleep', 'to sleep', and 'wake up'

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Abstract

The present research is an attempt to investigate the three verbs 'sleep', 'to sleep', and 'wake up' from a semantic point of view. It is the verb that determines the situation and, therefore, we shall prove that a verb like 'sleep' indicates a state whereas 'to sleep' indicates an action for the reason that they are usually associated with a change of state or not.

The 'structure of roles' shows the manner by which a participant takes part in a certain situation.

This notion adopted in this paper belongs to the well-known linguists Charles Fillmore (1968) and Lucien Tesnière (1959). It is argued in this research that the syntactic form in which 'to sleep' occurs is different from 'sleep' and that semantically they belong to different types of meaning.

Finally, we intend to prove universality on the results arrived at in this work.

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1- Introduction:

Ambiguity is normally divided into two types: linguistic and non-linguistic. (Lyons, 1977: 398). Linguistic ambiguity depends on the structure of the language system. That is, it results from such linguistic levels as phonology, syntax and semantics. Non-linguistic ambiguity is a sort of ambiguity which can be ascribed to non-linguistic factors such as context of situation or referentiality of certain words (ibid.).

In the present work, the term ambiguity will be restricted to the first kind, i.e. linguistic ambiguity and only to three verbs: sleep, to sleep; and wake up. These verbs are dealt with on the word and phrase levels. The meaning of the three verbs: sleep, to sleep, and wake up will be defined as in the following: The verb 'sleep' compared to the other two verbs is considered the centre. It denotes a state and it is semantically speaking ambiguous. However, syntactically its form is simple where it occurs in a clause, i.e. NP+V as in 'The boy sleeps'. To determine the class of this verb, one has to ask the following question: What is the general nature of the entities of this verb? As it is generally known, nouns indicate either natural places and geographical ones, objects or manufactured things and substances. Adjectives indicate properties, qualities, quantities, dispositions, etc.

However, there are always exceptions which are still unclear. Does, for example, the noun 'sum' indicate singular? Does the adjective 'future' indicate a property? The relation between parts of speech and

anthological categories are available for the majority of words. But as for verbs they indicate types of situations. Cruse (1986:1) states that "It is assumed that the semantic properties of a lexical item are fully reflected in appropriate aspects of the relations it contrasts with actual and potential contexts". This has a relation with the following concept which means in general that a sentence uttered in a discourse indicates a situation.

There are simple situations like the presence of a meteorological phenomenon. According to this, the verb denotes a meteorological phenomenon which is related to time and place. Therefore, when we say, for instance:

1. It is raining.

we affirm that drops of water are falling from the sky on the place where we are and in the time we utter this sentence. Also in:

2. It is hailing.

we affirm the existence of another meteorological phenomenon at the time and place of speaking, i.e. the falling of hailstone. These two verbs are used to explain this kind of different situations because the meaning of words helps in deciding the meaning of a sentence (see Lyons, 1977:40). Moreover, we have to indicate that there is no verb on the lexical level that includes time and place at the same time. The following two sentences illustrate the difference of situation in both time and place.

3. *It will rain tomorrow.*

4. *It hailed on the grass.*

The situations the verb 'sleep' indicates cannot exist without an animate subject which has the state of sleepness. In the definition of state, there is a point of distinction between the type of situation and its constituting participants. In the following sentence:

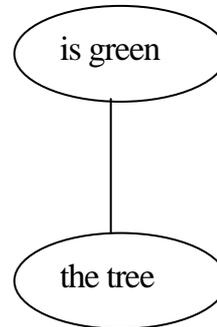
5. *The cat sleeps.*

the verb 'sleep' indicates the type of situation and the Np 'the cat' indicates the constituting participant.

2-*The verb 'sleep':*

Our interest in the next pages will be on various distinctions, that is why we say that 'sleep' indicates a state. According to Tesnière (1976:71) the verb expresses processes. This term has been adopted by A. Meillet in the general sense to indicate states and actions but we have to distinguish between a verb of state and a verb of action. This distinction is very clear in certain languages such as in Basque. The verbs of state are the verbs which express a state, i.e. a manner of being characterized by a quality or by a position.

6. *The tree is green*



As we know the verbs of state are so rare in French. This example shows us that the structural centre is the verb 'to be' and the semantic centre is the adjective which expresses the quality.

7. *John is standing (up)*

John est debout

Quirk et al. (1985:205) refer to the situation of verbs like 'stand', 'sit' and 'lie' which they call 'stance'. For us, the verb 'sleep' with its attributive value class is a state verb. Therefore, we will use this term to mean the following:

A state is a situation related to time and place and not controlled by an agent and internal evolution. This definition is not completely comprehensive in the actual state of our discussion for it contains elements whose function is to distinguish the states of other classes that we are going to introduce as in the following. As for the semantic description of 'sleep', we cannot only say at this point of this study that:

Sleep

NI sleep

class = state

So, how can we define this state?

First of all let us see what definitions we can find in the different dictionaries:

Le petit Larousse in the French dictionary "LAROUSSE" 'sleep'= dormir signifie "Reposer dans le sommeil".

In Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (2004:1210) 'sleep' is defined as "The natural state of rest in which your eyes are closed, your body is not active, and your mind is not conscious". French dictionaries such as petit Robert adopt the same procedure but their definition is more instructive when they define drowsiness: "etat physiologique normal et periodique caracterise essentiellement par la suspension de la conscience, la resolution musculaire, le ralentissement de la circulation, et par l'activite onirique".

Another definition would be: "sleep is the process in which humans and animals periodically rest with greater or lesser degree of unconsciousness and decreased responsiveness to the surrounding world (Internet). The verb 'sleep' is intransitive. It does not normally take a direct object noun phrase: "you don't sleep 'something' ", you just sleep (Internet :Roberts, M.J: 2004).

But does that information concern our language faculty? We have

not to forget the definition of polysmy: "when we look at words as meaningful units we also have to cope with the fact that one form may be associated with several meanings (Lyons,1977:39).It is based on the differences between the semantic structure as such and our non-linguistic knowledge which is based on conceptual structure. This distinction allows us to suppose that the concept of drowsiness is found in a way or another defined on the conceptual level. Therefore, we can treat 'sleep' as 'vague' on the semantic level; its lexical meaning consists in a way of an entry of the concept of drowsiness. On the other hand, 'sleep' has an argumentative structure. There is a constitutive participant (It must be someone to whom the state of drowsiness could be attributive. We can explain this by:

Sleep = an argumentative verb

The complete lexical entry will be

NP1 sleep

Class = state

State = sleep (argument)

Argumentative

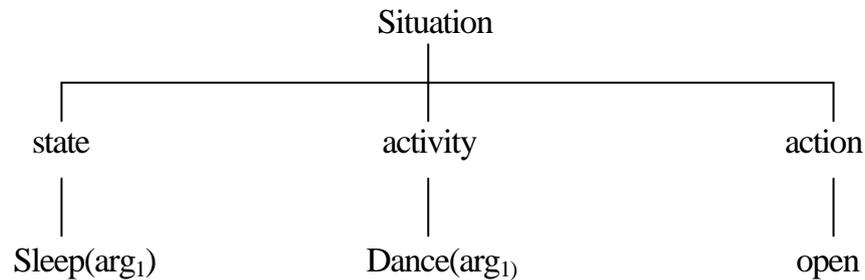
3.The verb 'to sleep':

The verb 'to sleep' is distinguished from the verb 'sleep' for different reasons. First of all, its syntactic normalized form is different. There are two nominal groups (syntagms): N₁ and N₂.This syntactic

complexity has a compensation on the semantic level: 'to sleep' has two arguments. The second difference is that 'to sleep' does not indicate a state. Effectively, the type of situation in which this verb is related has an internal evolution. It allows a change. This change concerns two states: a state of departure and a result state. These two states are characterized by the same situation of 'sleep' and they have the same constitutional participants. The result state is characterized as positive (A sleeps) while the state of departure is characterized by a negative manner (A does not sleep).

We will call 'action' the class to which the verb 'to sleep' belongs. The suitable definition of action will be: An action is a situation related to time and place controlled by an agent which has an internal evolution. This internal evolution is perhaps a change of physiological state, but also a change of material state. A good example for that is 'run', a mental change like 'understand', a quality change like 'grow', a possession change like 'give', a change of place like 'put', etc.

We can introduce a third verbal type which we call activity. Verbs like 'dance', 'speak', and 'run' indicate an activity. We can define activity as in the following: Activity is a situation related to time and place controlled by an agent but it has no internal evolution. The following taxonomy of the types of situation can be represented as



[Fig. 1 shows the types of situations (cf. Vendler,1967:97-121)]

Aktion Sartem is a German term which means a mode of action or modality of action. Fig.1 above is inspired by the system of Aktion Sartem by Vendler (ibid.). In his system he distinguishes four aspects which we can summarize by the following:

1. States: A knows B, A owns B, A is sick.
2. Activities: A is pushing a cart, A is running.
3. Accomplishments: A is running a mile, A is writing a letter.
4. Achievements: A reaches the top, A wins the race.

Our analysis of the verb 'to sleep' leads us to say the following points:

- From the class value, this verb designs an action.
- The situations designed by this verb consist of a change of state.
- This verb has two arguments.

But we have to realize that the first argument of the verb 'to sleep' is the person who caused the change of state and the second argument affronts this change of state. This kind of lexical information is called the 'structure of roles': The participants of these different types of situation

play these roles. We mean by 'role' the manner of a participant who participates in the situation.

Principally, the roles could be defined on variety abstraction levels. Therefore, in a situation like A sells B, A is the seller as well as being the agent (cf. Cruse, 1986:5).

Generally speaking, we look for a definition of the roles on the higher level of abstraction. The same role is able to characterize a huge number of the types of situations. We are able to characterize the following three roles:

1. The agent is himself who creates and controls the situation. He is the constitution of actions and activities. He must be animate.
2. The patient is the one who undergoes the situation or he/she gets benefit from it without creating or controlling the situation.
3. The theme participates in the situation in non-specific manner. It is the constitution of states and actions. We can illustrate these notions by the following sentences:

8. Zeki pushes the bicycle.

This sentence designates a situation in which we can distinguish two constitutional participants, Zeki and the bicycle. Zeki is in the role of agent, while the bicycle is in the role of theme.

9. The thief stole the bicycle to Zeki.

In this sentence, we have a different situation. Certainly, this is explained by the verb stole.

As for the structure of the roles, we have an agent (the thief), a patient (Zeki), and a theme (the bicycle).

The notion of the structure of roles belongs to the two famous linguists Charles Fillmore in his "The case for case" (1968) and the French linguist Lucien Tesniere in his "Elements de syntaxe structurale" (1959). Tesniere in his book distinguishes three actants:

- The first actant, semantically, is the one who does the action.
- The second actant is the one who supports the action.
- The third actant is the one who gets benefits or detriments of what the action does.

As for Fillmore, he proposes in his article a syntax based on deep cases. The following are some of the cases (Fillmore, 1968:24ff):

- Agentive, the case of the typically animate perceived instigator of the action identified by the verb.
- Dative, the case of the animate being affected by the state or action identified by the verb.
- Factive, the case of the object or being resulting from the action or state identified by the verb.
- Objective, the semantically most neutral case. "Things which are affected by the state or action identified by the verb" (see also Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973:171-173).

Although these conceptions are different from each other, they have the same idea. They have their success in Europe (Fillmore,1968; Tesnière,1959).

We can associate all the necessary elements for formulating the lexical entry of the verb 'to sleep'.

To sleep

NP₁ to sleep NP₂

class = action

action = to sleep (arg.₁, arg.₂)

arg₁=a

role = agent

arg₂ = p

role = patient

result = change (state₁, state₂)

state₁= not sleep

state₂ = sleeping

4. The verb 'Wake up':

The verb wake up is distinguished from the verb 'to sleep' by only the sequences of the states that undergo the changes.

Wake

NP₁ Wakes NP₂

class = action

action = wake (arg_1, arg_2)

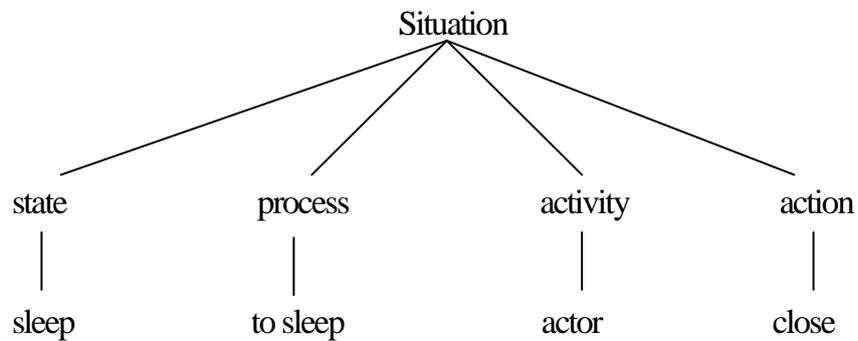
$arg_1 = a$

role = agent

$arg_2 = p$

role = patient

The processes is different from action and activity due to the absence of the agent and state but it has an internal evolution. We can present the following figure



[Fig. 2 shows a taxonomy of situations]

5. Conclusion :

After this presentation, we have arrived at the conclusion that we can use a structural syntagmatic and semantic representation in our linguistic courses, and we can make use of this study in teaching our own native language or foreign languages especially in teaching lexical semantics.

In French, for example, the equivalent of 'sleep' is 'dormir' whereas the equivalent of 'to sleep' is 'endormir'. The verb 'dormir' is intransitive indicating a state while 'endormir' which means (to put or to send to sleep) is transitive indicating an action.

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ملخص

دلالة الأفعال ينام، لينام ويستيقظ

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يتمحور هذا البحث في دراسة دلالية للأفعال 'sleep' و 'to sleep' و 'wake up'. من المعروف ان الفعل يحدد سياق الحال ولهذا سنبرهن أن فهلاً 'sleep' يعد فعل حالة في حين 'to sleep' يدل على فعل حركة لعدة أسباب يتناولها البحث لانهم يرتبطون عادة بتغيير حالة أو لا.

تبيين "الأدوار" الطريقة التي يشارك بموجبها المشاركون في سياق معلوم. ويعود هذا المفهوم الذي تم تبنيه في هذه الدراسة للغويين الشهيرين جارلس فلم (1968) ولويزيان تينبيغ (1959).

يبين هذا البحث بأن الصيغة النحوية التي يقع فيها 'to sleep' تختلف عن 'sleep' وانهما يعودان دلاليًا إلى أصناف مختلفة. وأخيراً ستقوم بإثبات ان النتائج التي تم التوصل إليها في هذا البحث هي عالمية وتنطبق على كل اللغات.

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