Semantics of a Word and Contextual Relations

Meaning

Signified vs. Signifier

TREE

the mental image

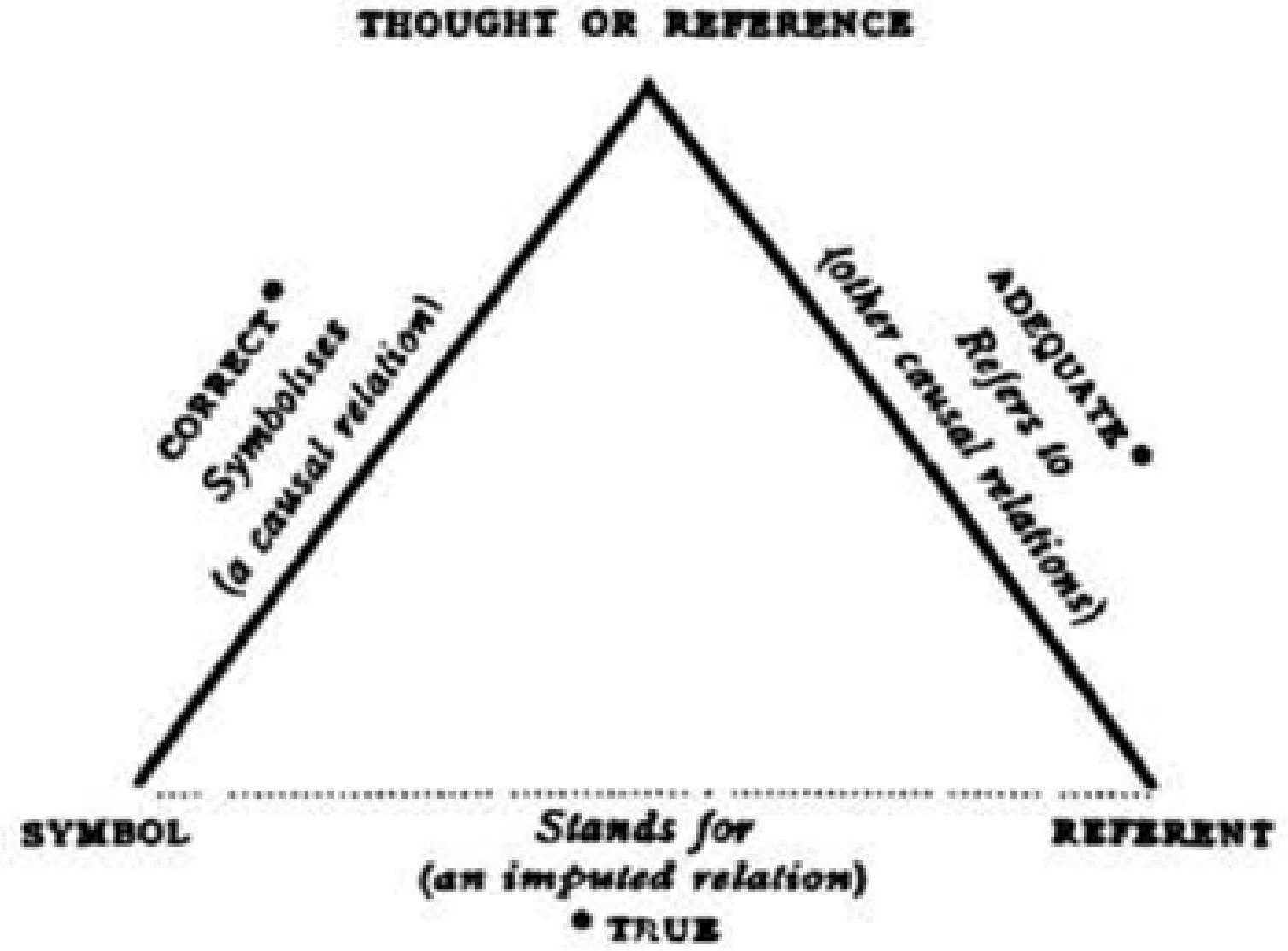
the content

the sound aspect

the sign

the symbol

The semantic triangle Ogden&Richards



- Lexeme

- the bearer of meaning, a unit of vocabulary – the lexical item

- it can have semantic representation in several words, e.g. *nut, head*

- Sememe

- the meaning of the lexeme, a set of semantic elements (semes)

- Semantic field

- a named area of meaning in which lexemes interrelate and define each other

- Denotative meaning

- an objective link between a lexeme (a reflection of reality in the language) and the reality

- referential or cognitive meaning: *dog – canine quadruped*

- Connotative meaning

- an equivalent of the emotional aspect

- represents the personal dimension, *dog – helper, friend*

e.g. bus – denotation x connotation

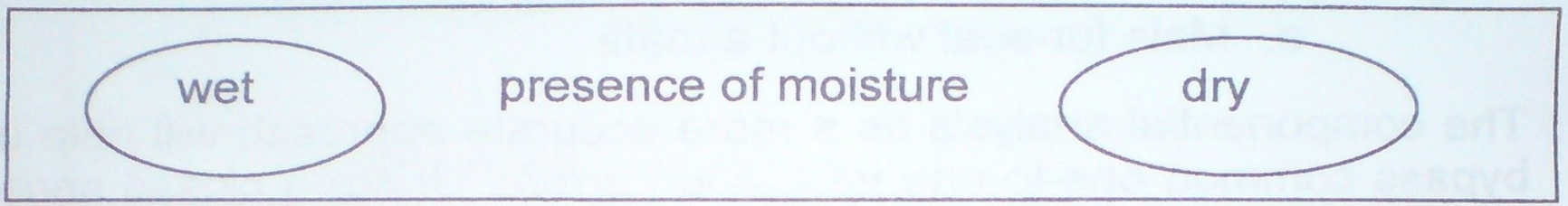
Componential analysis

- we can analyse the meaning of words by single components – series os semes
- each seme is allocated a dichotomic value (present/non-present)
- words organized in semantic fields have certain features in common

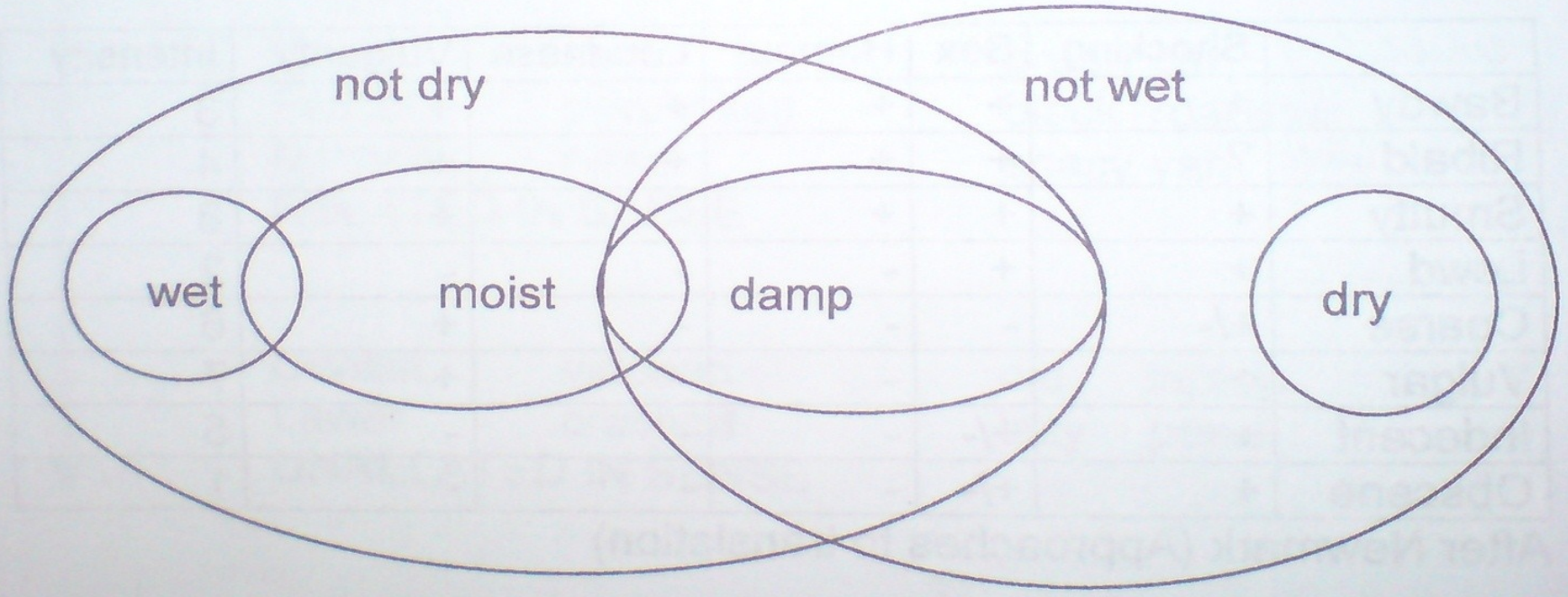
woman +human, –male, +adult
man +human, +male, +adult
girl +human, –male, –adult
boy +human, +male, –adult

Diagrammatic representation

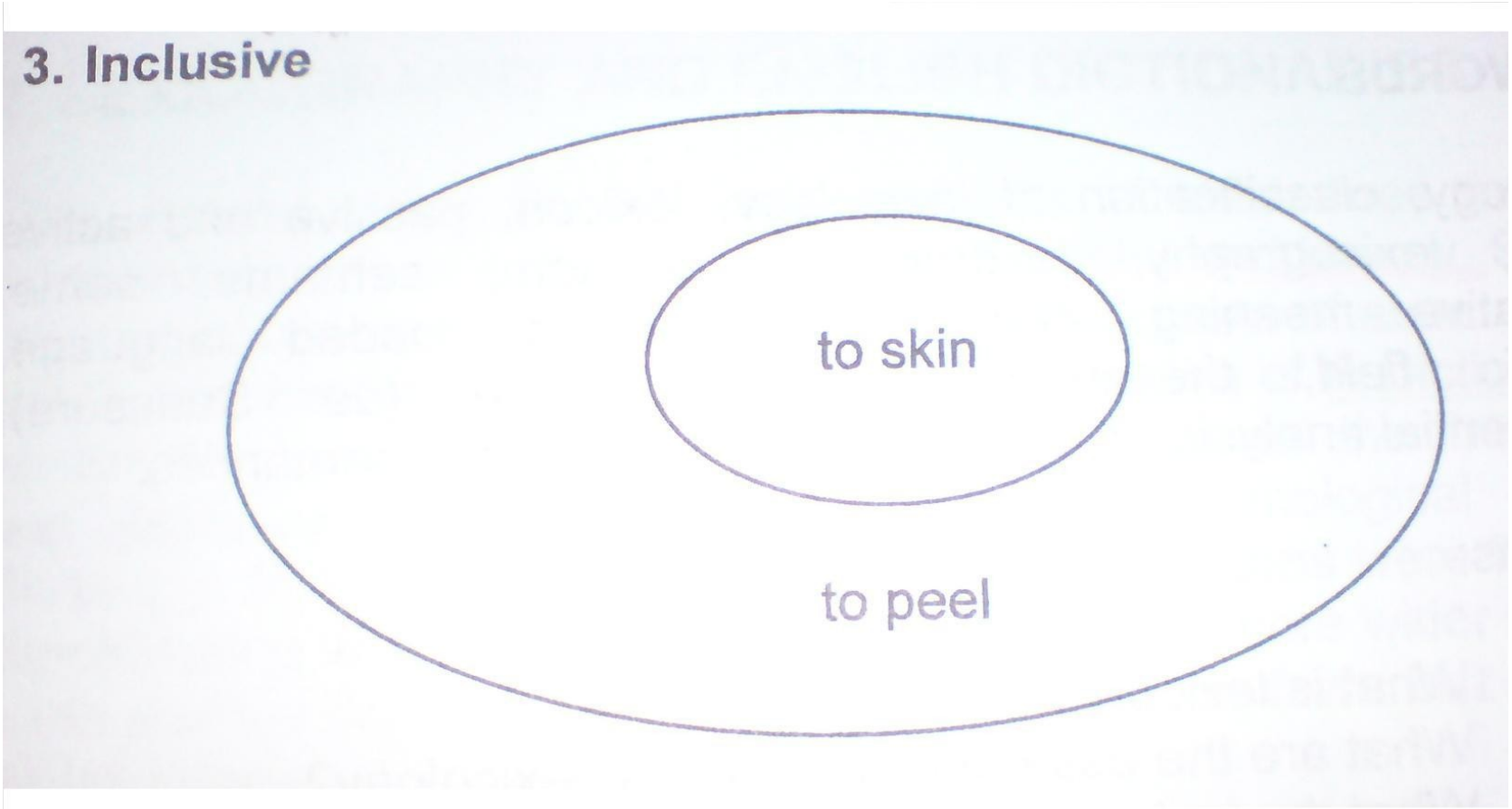
1. Without overlap



2. Overlapping



Diagrammatic representation



Lexical structure (Ferdinand de Saussure)

- syntagmatic level - horizontal dimension in which we sense the relationship between lexemes in a sequence. We know intuitively which words occure together.

- paradigmatic level – vertical dimension in which one lexeme can be substituted by another

Example: Alice's hat is green.

Paradigmatic (substitution)

Syntagmatic (sequence) →

People	**Clothing**	**to be**	**Color**
Alice's	*hat*	*is*	*green.*
My	*coat*	*isn't*	*yellow.*
The vicar's	*pyjamas*	*were*	*pink.*

- Every aspect of the meaning of a word is reflected in a pattern of semantic normality (and abnormality) in grammatically appropriate contexts.

- Contextual relations = the full set of normality relations which a lexical item contracts with all possible contexts.

- The meaning of a word = a pattern of affinities and disaffinities with all the other words in the language with which it is capable of contrasting semantic relations.

Syntagmatic Affinity

=established by a normal association in an utterance

- Syntagmatic affinity: dog x barked

The dog barked. = normal association

- Syntagmatic disaffinity:

The lions were chirruping. = abnormal

Paradigmatic affinity

- A semantic affinity between two grammatically identical words is the greater the more compatible their patterns of syntagmatic normality.

- e. g. *dog* and *cat* share far more normal and abnormal contexts than *dog* and *lamp-post:*

Arthur fed the dog/ cat/ lamp-post.

The dog/ cat/ lamp-post ran away.

We painted the dog/ cat/ lamp-post red.

Semantic Trait

- The meaning of a word can be seen as made up of the meanings of other words. A particular word-meaning which participates in this way in the meaning of another word is termed a semantic trait of the second word.
- Statues (degrees and modes of participation) of semantic traits:
  Criterial
  Expected
  Possible
  Unexpected
  Excluded

Criterial and Excluded Traits

- Diagnosed by means of entailment relations between sentences.

- e.g. “animal” = criterial trait of *dog* because *It’s a dog* entails *It’s an animal.*

- e. g. “fish” = excluded trait of *dog* because *It’s a dog* entails *It’s not a fish.*

Expected, Possible and Unexpected Traits

- The *but*-test shows the normality or abnormality of sentences of the form *A, but B.*

- e.g. consider the status of "can bark" as a trait of *dog:*

It's a dog does not entail *It can bark.* = it is not a criterial trait but an expected trait.

It's a dog, but it can bark. (odd)

It's a dog, but it can't bark. (normal)

- Expressive paradox = the expressive meaning carried by *but* is inappropriately ordered.

- e.g. *It's a dog, but it can sing.*

  It's a dog, but it can't sing.

- A possible trait is signalled when sentences exhibit expressive paradox.

- e.g. *It's a dog, but it is brown.*

  It's a dog, but it isn't brown.

Distinction within Expected Status

- "adapted for flight" as a trait of *bird:*

It's a bird does not entail *It is adapted for flight.* (e.g. kiwi)

- "posesses four legs" as a trait of *dog:*

It's a dog does not entail *It has four legs.*

- dog without four legs is imperfect, ill-formed

- birds not adapted for flight are atypical

- Canonical traits – semantic traits whose absence is regarded as a defect

- Implication – the meaning which a speaker or writer intends but does not communicate directly. A listener is able to deduce or infer the intended meaning from what has been uttered.

e.g. “A bus!”

- Ambiguity - occurs when a language element has more than one meaning. If the ambiguity is in a single word it is lexical ambiguity. If in a sentence or clause, it isgrammatical or structural ambiguity

e.g. - lexical – *gay society*

- structural - headlines – *CHURCHILL FLIES BACK TO FRONT*

Semantic relations

- Synonymy – boy, lad
- Antonymy – truth, lie
- Polysemy – nut, bear
- Homonymy - bank, fair, toast
- Homophony – son x sun, tale x tail, to spring x spring
- Homography – She can **tear** his arguments like a piece of cloth. X Her **tear** has no effect on him.

- Hyponymy – *cat* is a hyponym of *animal*
- Hyperonymy – *animal* is a hyperonym of *cat*

e.g. hyponym of: season

hyperonym of: rose, daffodil, tulip

Thank you for your attention!