

*The Handbook of Linguistics*, Edited by Mark Aronoff, Janie Rees-Miller, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, pages 242-244.

second type, the inclusion is observable at the level of individual entities, as in the case of *finger* and *hand*, where every individual hand includes a number of fingers as parts.

The class-inclusion relation, called *hyponymy*, is exemplified by *dog:animal*, *apple:fruit*, *tulip:flower*, *cathedral:building*, *beer:beverage*, *copper:metal*, *kitten:cat*, *mare:horse*, *actress:woman*, and so on; of the two related items the more specific is called the *hyponym* (e.g., *dog*, *apple*), and the more general is called the *superordinate* (less commonly, the *hyperonym*), e.g., *animal*, *fruit*. Notice that although *dog* is a hyponym of *animal*, it is a superordinate of, say, *spaniel*.

Hyponymy can be thought of as the “— is a —” relation which guarantees the truth of general statements such as *An apple is a fruit* and *An actress is a woman*. For a lexical item X to be a hyponym of another item Y, the truth of *An X is a Y* must follow logically from the meanings of X and Y. An expectation that if something is an X, it is likely to be also a Y, is not enough. For instance, if someone talks about *cat*, most people will assume that the cat in question is somebody’s pet. However, this does not enable us to say that *cat* is a hyponym of *pet*, because there are cats which are not pets, and so *Cats are pets* is not automatically true by virtue of its meaning.

**5.1.2 Relations of identity and inclusion II: meronymy** The part-whole relation, in its lexical aspect, is called *meronymy* (sometimes *partonymy*); for instance, *finger* is a *meronym* of *hand*, and *hand* is the *immediate holonym* of *finger*. The notion of meronymy, like hyponymy, is relational rather than absolute: *hand*, for instance, is the holonym of *finger*, but it is at the same time a meronym of *arm*, which in turn is a meronym of *body*. The chain of relations stops at *body*, which may be termed the *global holonym*. Other examples of meronymy are as follows: *arm:body*, *petal:flower*, *engine:car*, *blade:knife*. Prototypical meronymic pairs (where X is a meronym of Y) are normal in frames such as: *X is a part of Y*; *A Y has an X*; *parts of a Y are A, B, C ... and so on*. Meronymy must be clearly distinguished from hyponymy, although both involve a species of inclusion. An easy way to highlight the difference is to note that a finger is not a kind of hand (meronymy), nor is a dog a part of an animal (hyponymy).

Not all portions of an object qualify as parts: a glass tumbler dropped on a stone floor does not break up into parts, but into pieces. The things we habitually call parts typically have a distinctive function or they are separated from sister parts by a formal discontinuity of some sort (or both). For instance, the wheels of a car have the function of allowing it to move smoothly over the ground, and transmit the motive power; the steering-wheel allows the direction of movement to be controlled; the door handles allow the doors to be opened and shut manually. Discontinuity manifests itself in a number of ways. For example, the wheels of a car are detachable and can move relative to the chassis; the fingers of a hand are not detachable, but have a certain freedom of movement; discontinuity may also be visual, like the cuff of a sleeve, or the iris of the eye.

Parts may be necessary or optional. The necessity in question is not a logical necessity, but a well-formedness condition: a hand with a finger missing is still a hand, but it is not a well-formed hand. In this sense, *finger* is a necessary (or *canonical*) part of *hand*, as is *prong* of *fork*. On the other hand, *beard* may be perfectly well formed without beards, and doors without handles — here we are dealing with optional (or *facultative*) parts. Some parts are more tightly integrated into their wholes than others. An indication of less than full integration is the possibility of describing the parts as “attached to” its whole; this is typically not normal with fully integrated parts. Contrast *The handle is attached to the door* (not fully integrated) and *?The handle is attached to the spoon* (fully integrated).

**5.1.3 Relations of identity and inclusion III: synonymy** Dictionaries typically define synonyms on the lines of “words with the same or a similar meaning.” This description undoubtedly applies to all words that we would intuitively call synonyms: *begin* and *commence*, *death* and *demise*, *wedding* and *marriage*, *motor* and *engine*. However, it is not restrictive enough, as it surely also applies to, for instance, *mare* and *stallion*, which both refer to horses, but which are not synonyms. It would seem useful, therefore, to examine more closely the notion of “same or similar meaning.”

Synonym pairs or groups can be categorized according to how close the meanings of the words are. Three degrees of closeness can be recognized: *absolute synonymy*, *propositional synonymy*, and *near synonymy*.

The greatest possible resemblance between two senses is identity, in other words, absolute synonymy. A characterization of absolute synonyms based on Haas's contextual approach was offered earlier, namely, that they are equinormal in all (grammatically well-formed) contexts. This is based on the assumption that any difference of meaning will reveal itself as a difference in co-occurrence possibilities, hence the discovery of a context where one of the putative synonyms is more normal than the other rules out the pair as absolute synonyms. This is an extremely strict criterion, and a rigorous testing of candidate pairs leads rapidly to the conviction that absolute synonyms are hard to come by. From the semiotic point of view this should probably not be surprising: there is no obvious reason why a language should have two forms with absolutely identical meanings. Let us look at a few possible examples of absolute synonymy:

(i) nearly / almost:

These are shown to be not absolute synonyms by the differences in normality between (15) and (16), and between (17) and (18):

(15) We're very nearly home now.

(16) ?We're very almost home now.

(17) He looks almost Chinese.

(18) ?He looks nearly Chinese.

(ii) big / large:

The difference in normality between (19) and (20) is enough to disqualify these:

(19) You're making a big mistake.

(20) ?You're making a large mistake.

(iii) begin / commence:

These, too, are disqualified:

(21) Are you sitting comfortably, children? Then I'll begin.

(22) ?Are you sitting comfortably, children? Then I'll commence.

Absolute synonymy presumably approximates to what those people have in mind who maintain that true synonyms do not occur in natural languages.

There is perhaps a case for saying that absolute identity of meaning can occur between forms belonging to different varieties, especially dialects, of a language. An obvious example would be *fall* and *autumn* in American and British English, respectively. These are no different in principle to translational equivalents in different languages. Notice, however, that these would not come out as absolute synonyms by the Haasian test, since *fall* would be less normal than *autumn* in a sentential context that was otherwise lexically marked as British English. Saying that *fall* and *autumn* are identical in meaning presupposes a non-Haasian notion of what meaning is.

Propositional synonymy is less strict than absolute synonymy, and examples of this variety are consequently more numerous. It can be defined in logical terms: propositional synonyms can be substituted in any declarative sentence *salva veritate*, that is, without changing its truth value. By this criterion, *begin* and *commence* are propositional synonyms, because if *The lecture began at nine o'clock* is true, then so is *The lecture commenced at nine o'clock*, and vice versa.

There are too few absolute and propositional synonyms in any language to justify the existence of a dictionary of synonyms; the majority of what lexicographers call synonyms are, in our terms, near synonyms. The following illustrate sets of near synonyms:

- (i) kill, murder, execute, assassinate
- (ii) laugh, chuckle, giggle, guffaw, snigger, titter
- (iii) walk, stroll, saunter, stride, amble
- (iv) anxious, nervous, worried, apprehensive, fearful
- (v) brave, courageous, plucky, bold, heroic
- (vi) calm, placid, tranquil, peaceful, serene

The words in these sets are not necessarily propositionally identical, so for at least some pairs it is not anomalous to assert one member and simultaneously deny the other:

- (23) He wasn't murdered, he was executed.
- (24) They didn't chuckle, they tittered.
- (25) He was plucky, but not heroic.

Near synonyms often occur normally in the test-frame *X, or rather Y*, which signals first, that *Y* conveys propositional information not present in *X*, and second, that the difference is relatively minor. Thus, (26) is normal, but (27) is odd, because the difference in meaning is too great; (28) is odd because there is no propositional difference:

- (26) He was murdered, or rather, executed.
- (27) ?He was murdered, or rather, beaten up.
- (28) ?He was killed, or rather, deprived of life.

Near synonyms, then, are words which share a salient common core of meaning, but differ in relatively minor respects. There is at present no more precise characterization of "minor" in this context.

Synonyms (of all kinds) often occur in clusters, and it is common for the cluster to be centered round a neutral word which subsumes all the rest, and of which the others are a semantic elaboration. For instance, *kill*, *laugh*, *walk*, *anxious*, *brave*, and *calm* are the central items, respectively, in the sets detailed above.

~~4. Relations of opposition and exclusion I: incompatibility and co-meronymy~~ We have looked at relations of inclusion; equally important are relations of exclusion, especially those which hold between sister items under a common inclusive term. Just as there are two sorts of inclusion, there are also two corresponding sorts of exclusion, which receive the labels *incompatibility* and *co-meronymy*.

~~Incompatibility is the relation which holds between, for instance, *cat* and *dog*, *apple* and *banana*, *rose* and *tulip*, *man* and *woman*, *church* and *supermarket*, *bus* and *tractor*. The essence of this relation is mutual exclusion of classes: if something is a cat, then it follows ineluctably that it is not a dog, and vice versa – there is nothing which is simultaneously a cat and a dog. The same is true for the members of the other pairs mentioned. Note that this is not simple difference of meaning. Take the case of *novel* and *paperback*, which are both synonyms of *book*. They clearly do not mean the same; on the other hand, they are not incompatible, because something can be simultaneously a novel and a paperback. The same applies to *mother* and *doctor*, and *tall* and *blonde*.~~

~~A particular relation of exclusion applies to sister meronyms of the same holonym, as in *cheek*, *chin* of *face*, or *wheel*, *engine*, *chassis* of *car*, and so on. Here the exclusion is (at least~~