

Semantics as a Branch of Linguistics

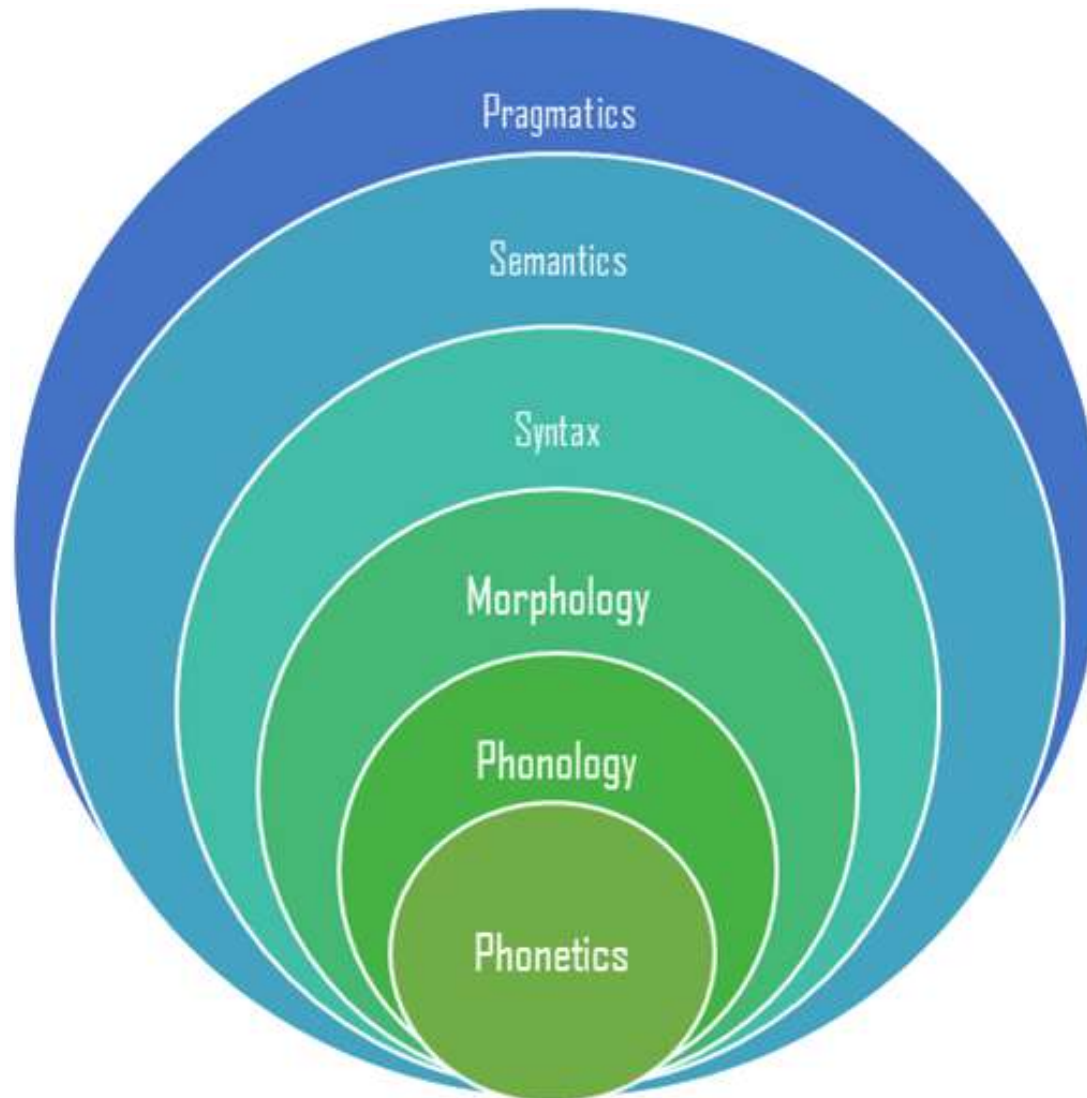
Lecture 4

Outline

1. Semantics as a branch of Linguistics.
2. Meaning. Theories of meaning.
2. The word and its semantic structure.
3. Aspects of meaning. Types of meanings.
4. The main semantic processes.
5. Lexical Relations.

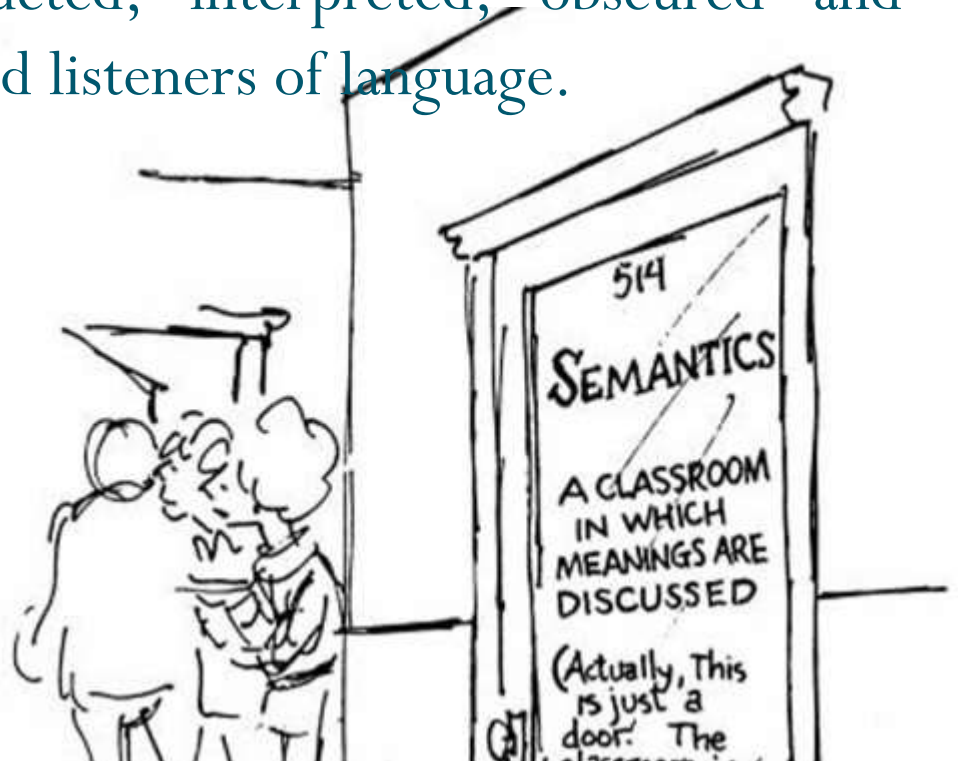


Linguistics



Semantics

- **Semantics** is a sub-discipline of Linguistics which studies the meaning in language.
- Semantics **investigates** meaning as an element of language and how it is constructed, interpreted, obscured and negotiated by speakers and listeners of language.



Semantics

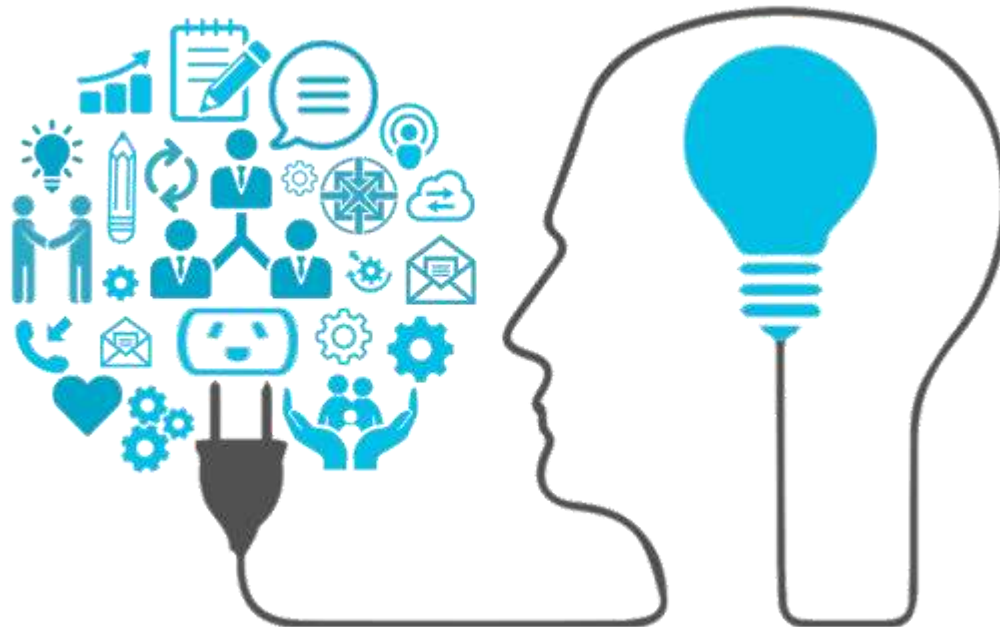
Semantics concerns itself with “giving a systematic account of the nature of meaning.” [Leech, 1981]



Semantics

1830s Karl Reising, a German scholar: the studies of meaning should be regarded as an independent branch of knowledge.

1987 Michel Breal, a French scholar: “*Essai de semantique*” (a monograph on meaning).



Semantics

19th-20th centuries

Key features:

- ❑ diachronistic;
- ❑ concentrated on the process of semantic change;
- ❑ atomistic: semantic changes were traced and described for isolated words not taking into account the interrelation of structures existing within each language.

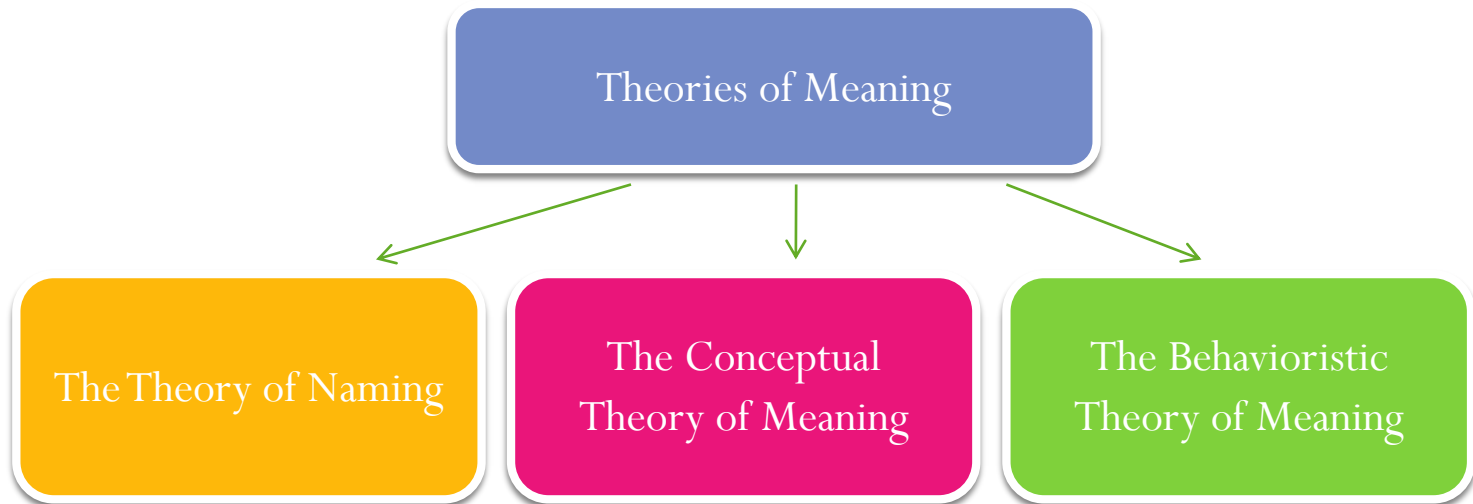
Meaning

- ❑ the message conveyed by words, sentences, and symbols in a context.
- ❑ Report on the topic **“Word meaning”**:
- ❑ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/word-meaning/>

ATTENTION



Theories of Meaning



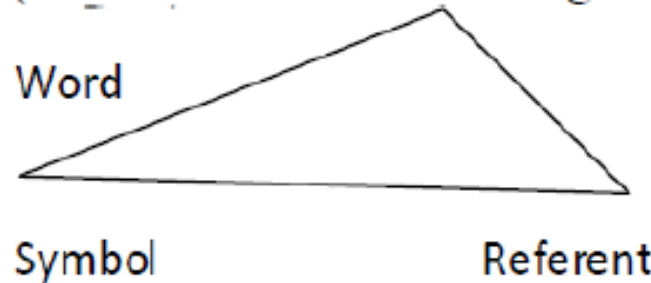
The Theory of Naming

- ❑ language is a communication system which works with two elements, the signifier and the signified;
- ❑ the signifier is a word in the language;
- ❑ the signified is the object in the world that it 'stands for' or 'refers to';
- ❑ words and things are directly related.

The Conceptual Theory of Meaning

- words and things are related through the mediation of concepts of the mind

Thought (or Reference or Meaning or Concept)



the symbol = the linguistic element; the word, phrase, sentence

the referent = the object in the world

thought or reference = concept

The Behavioristic Theory of Meaning

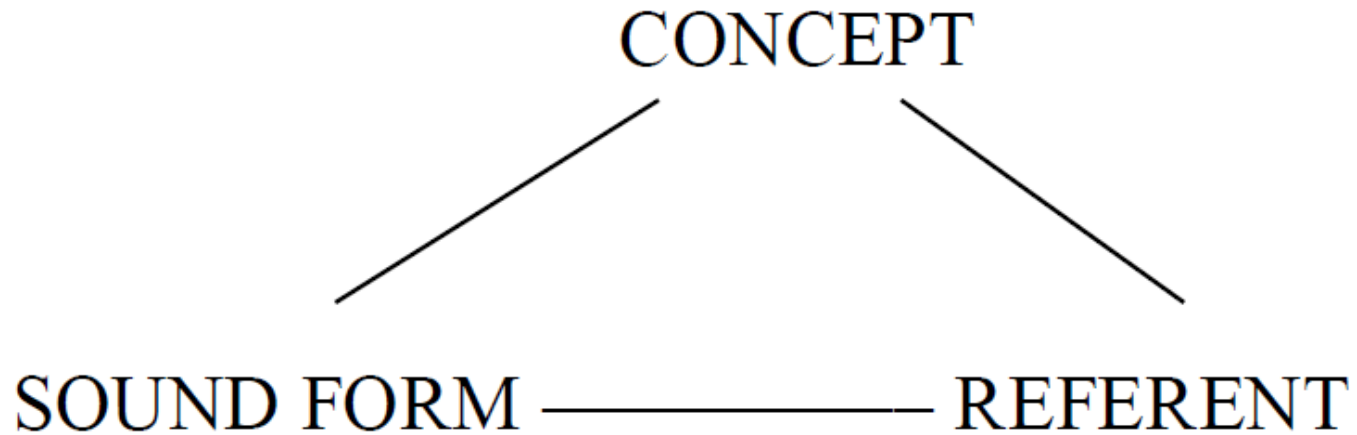
- ❑ the description of language is not complete without the reference to the context in which the language operates



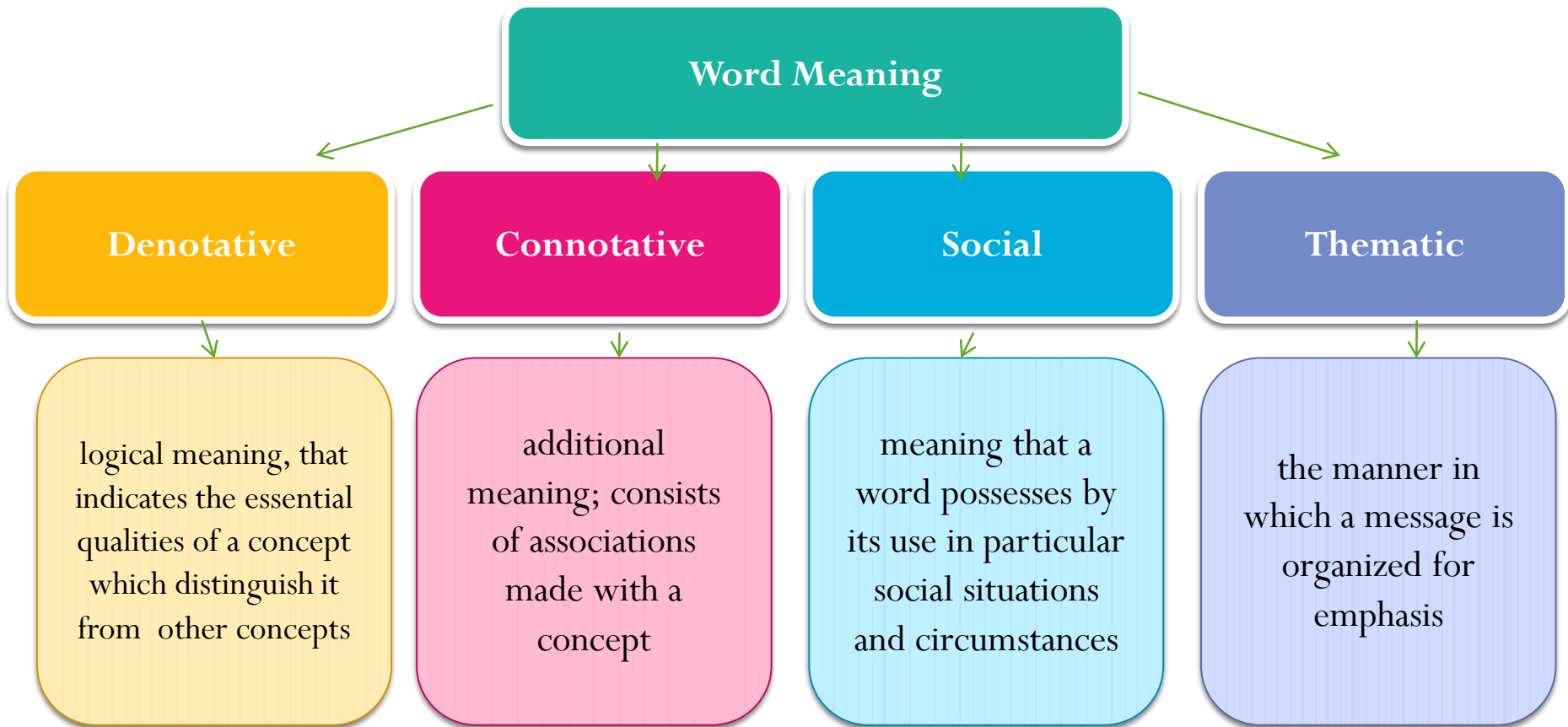
The Word and its Semantic Structure

Referential Approach	Functional Approach
establishes interdependence between words and things or concepts they denote	investigates the function of a word in speech and is less concerned with what meaning is than with how it works

Basic Triangle



Aspects of a Word Meaning



Types of Meaning

Types of Meaning

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graph TD; A[Types of Meaning] --> B[Lexical]; A --> C[Grammatical];
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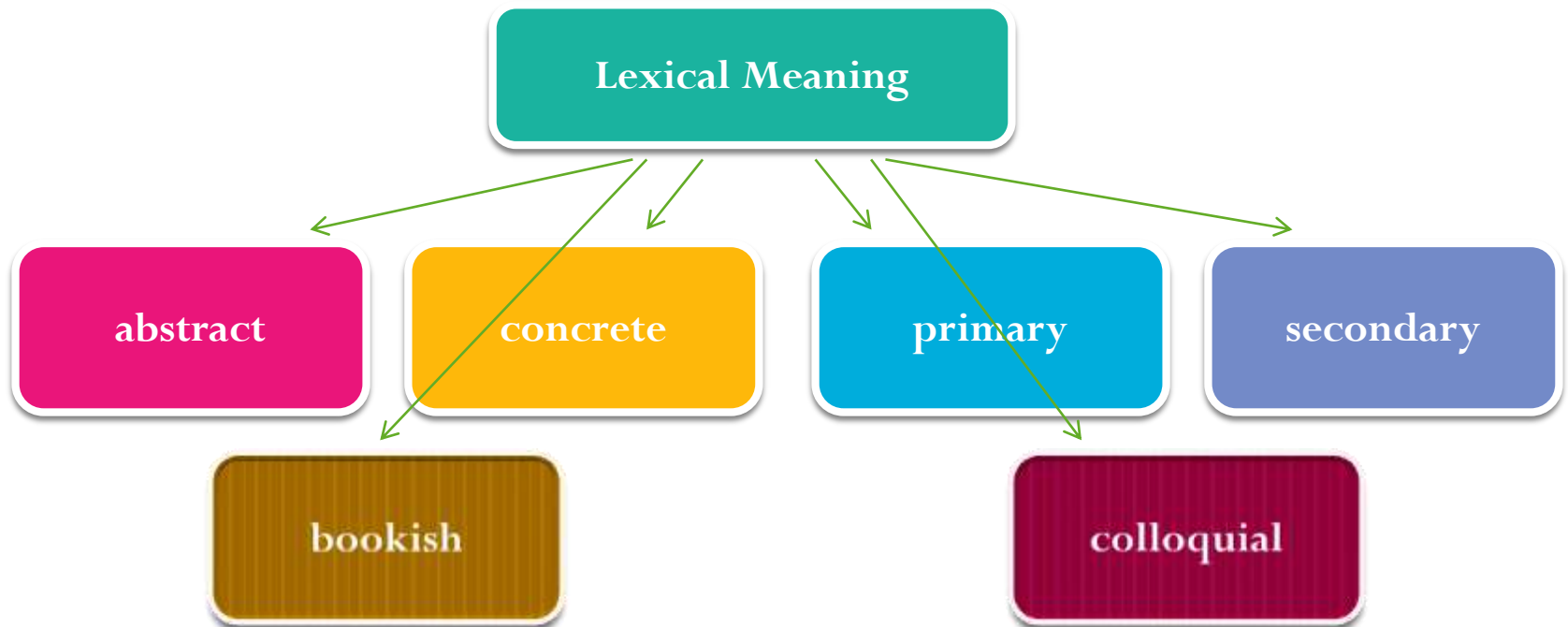
Lexical

a component of meaning is identical in all forms of the word, e.g. *write-writes-wrote-written* denote the same process

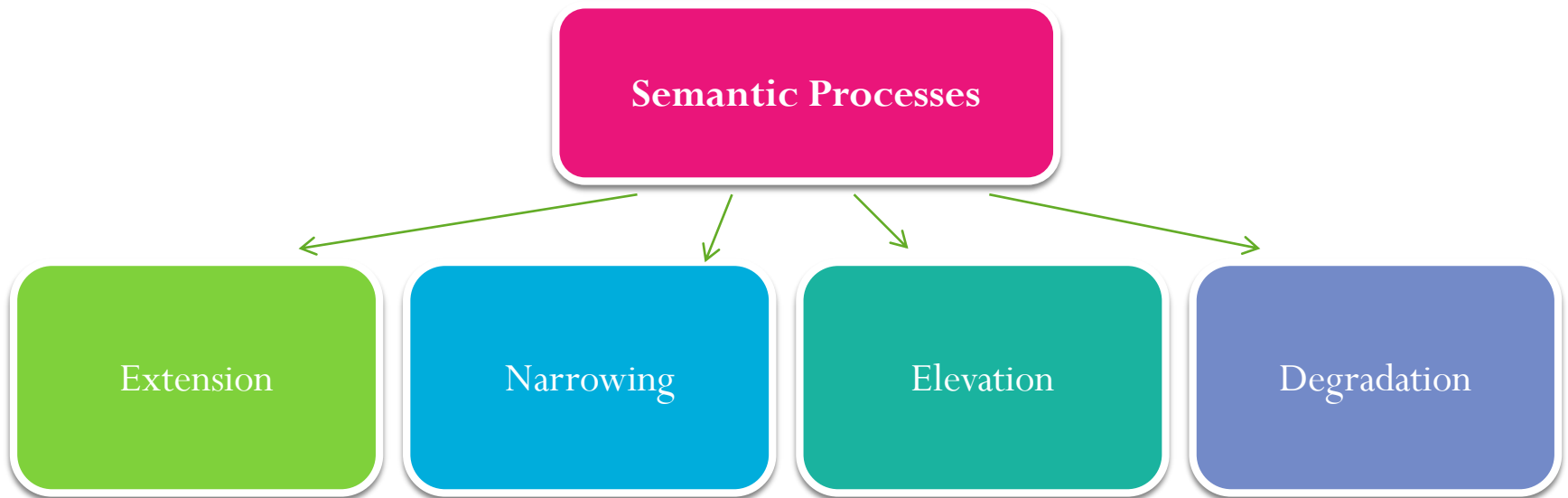
Grammatical

a component of meaning recurrent in identical sets of individual forms of different words, e.g. tense meaning: *asked*, *spoke*

Types of Lexical Meaning



Semantic Processes



Extension of Meaning

- ❑ *Season* once had the meaning spring, time for sowing. Now it embraces all parts of the year.
- ❑ *Salary* once had the meaning the money to buy salt for. Now it means money to buy anything.
- ❑ *Thing* once meant anything that can be agreed on in trade. Now it has a generic meaning.
- ❑ *Town* once meant fence. Now it denotes a settlement.
- ❑ *Arrive* once meant to land, to reach the shore. Now any place of destination is presupposed.

Narrowing of Meaning

- ❑ *Deer* meant any beast
- ❑ *Stool* once meant табурет і стілець. After the word chair was borrowed from French, the word stool began to be used only for табурет.
- ❑ *Operation* has quite different meanings to a financial worker, to a mathematician, to a military man and to a physician.

Elevation of Meaning

- *Fame* meant news (good or bad). Now it means glory.
- *Nice* meant foolish. The word was gradually specialized in the sense foolishly particular about trifles. Then the idea of folly was lost and particular about small things, accurate came into existence.
- To **adore** had the meaning to speak with, to greet, to address. Now it means to love, to worship.

Degradation of Meaning

- *Idiot* meant private in Greek and uneducated in Latin. Now it has a negative meaning of a fool in both languages.
- *Greedy* meant hungry. Now it means stingy.
- *Villain* meant a person living in the country. Now it means a scoundrel.

Lexical Relations

synonymy	words with very closely related meanings, which are often, but not always, intersubstitutable in sentences
antonymy	words with opposite meanings
hyponymy	the meaning of one form is included in the meaning of another
prototype	explains the meaning of certain words not in terms of component feature but in terms of resemblance to the clearest exemplar
homophony	two or more differently written forms that have the same pronunciation but different meaning
homography	two or more forms are the same only in writing but different in pronunciation and meaning
homonymy	one form (written or spoken) has two or more unrelated meanings, but have the same pronunciation and spelling
polysemy	one form (written or spoken) having multiple meanings which are all related by extension
metonymy	relationship essentially based on a close connection in everyday experience.
collocation	words which tend to occur with other words