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## Unlocking Language's Hidden Treasures: The Semantics Enigma in ELT

**Riya J. Raval**

Research Scholar,

Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat.

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper explores the pivotal role of semantics in English Language Teaching (ELT). Semantics, as a branch of linguistics, deals with the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences in a language. In the context of ELT, understanding semantics is crucial for language educators as it forms the foundation for effective language comprehension, expression, and communication. This abstract provides an overview of the significance of semantics in ELT, highlighting its impact on vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, language production, and intercultural communication. The study delves into various pedagogical approaches that incorporate semantic strategies to enhance language learning outcomes in diverse classroom settings. Furthermore, it examines the challenges faced by both teachers and learners in the process of semantic comprehension and explores potential solutions to optimize ELT practices. The findings of this research contribute valuable insights to language educators, curriculum designers, and researchers, providing a comprehensive understanding of the significance of semantics in shaping successful language learning experiences.

**Keywords:** Semantics, Linguistics, ELT, Semantics roles & Feature.

### **Introduction:**

In recent time as it is visible that world is evolving in every possible way. From Ancient teaching institute to Artificial Intelligent it is quite evident that teaching has been significant part of human society from sharing knowledge in symposium to discussing/teaching on virtual platform and from virtual platform to having been able to learn and ask questions to AI at any period of time and from having one Guru in life to have different AI platforms it can be said that Teaching and Learning both are evolving with world & time and it has been evident that the role of teaching has always been significant aspects of human society. In teaching specifically when it comes to teaching a language especially English-which itself is a heterogeneous language which still holds foremost space in India since 1835. in basic

understanding learning a language means to learn how to present your own self or more precisely your thoughts which means to answer all of those questions which starts from where, how, why and what. ELT is field which suggest to the most common way of showing English as a second or unknown dialect to non-native speakers. The objective of ELT is to assist students with fostering their capability in English, empowering them to impart really in English-talking conditions.

Semantics is the study of meaning in language. It is a critical component of English language teaching (ELT) because it allows learners to understand the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. Semantics is also important for reading comprehension, as it allows learners to understand the meaning of the text they are reading. There are a number of ways to teach semantics in ELT. One way is to focus on the literal meaning of words. This can be done by providing learners with definitions of words, or by using visual aids to help them understand the meaning of words. Another way to teach semantics is to focus on the connotative meaning of words. This is the emotional or associative meaning of words, and it is often more difficult to teach than literal meaning.

Semantics as a word was first used by Michel Breal who was a French philosopher. Later Alfred Korzybski developed a field called general semantics. Semantics is the branch of linguistics that deals with the study of meaning in language. It is concerned with how words, phrases, and sentences are used to convey meaning and how people interpret and understand language. Kasia M. Jaszczolt who is Polish British linguist, in her work which is titled as '*Meaning in Linguistic Interaction*' defines semantics as,

“semantics accounts for the meaning of words and sentences as abstract units, where words belong to a language system considered at a stable, fixed synchronic state abstracted from its development. Words are arranged into sentences, considered in isolation, by fixed rules of syntactic composition of a provenance that differs between different ideologies.”( Jaszczolt 11)

The book explores the intersection of semantics and pragmatics, two subfields of linguistics that study the meaning of language. Jaszczolt argues that meaning is not a fixed property of words or sentences, but rather emerges from the interaction of linguistic, cognitive, and social factors. She examines a variety of linguistic phenomena, including indexicality, presupposition, and implicature, to show how meaning is shaped by these factors.

Jaszczolt also discusses the role of context in meaning construction. She argues that context is not simply a backdrop against which meaning is interpreted, but rather an active

participant in the meaning-making process. She shows how context can affect the interpretation of words, sentences, and even entire texts.

The book concludes by considering the implications of the intersection of semantics and pragmatics for language teaching and learning. Jaszczolt argues that a comprehensive understanding of meaning requires an understanding of both linguistic and pragmatic factors. She suggests that language teaching should focus on helping learners to develop an awareness of the different factors that contribute to meaning construction.

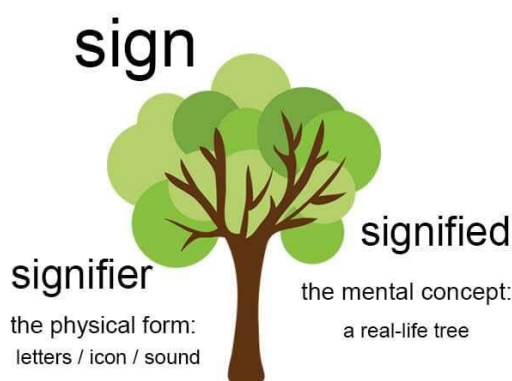
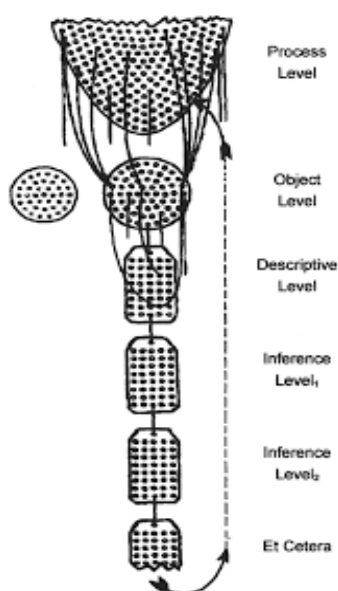
Semantics involves the analysis of the meanings of words and phrases in different contexts and how their meanings can change depending on the situation or the speaker's intention. In semantics, the meaning of words is studied in relation to the concepts they represent, the contexts in which they are used, and the relationships they have with other words. This includes analyzing the denotative (literal) and connotative (associative or non-literal) meanings of words, as well as the relationships between words. Semantics is important in language teaching and learning as it helps learners to understand how language works, how words and phrases are used in different contexts, and how to use them appropriately. It also helps learners to develop their communication skills by enabling them to express themselves more clearly and effectively. The role of semantics in ELT mainly emphasises on teaching vocabulary to develop comprehension skill, it also helps learners in enhancing speaking accuracy. Semantics also helps students to understand pragmatics which is concerned with the study of how language is used in social context. The focus of this Research paper will be mainly on examining the role of Semantics in ELT.

There are many scholars who have worked on the role of semantics in ELT. Ronald W. Langacker an American linguistic in his work '*Essential of Cognitive Grammar*' talked about theory of grammar that emphasizes the role of semantics in grammar and language use. Steven Pinker who is Canadian American Cognitive psychologist. He has done research on the relationship between semantics, syntax, and pragmatics in language use. Michael Hoey British linguist who has done research on the relationship between language use and language structure. He has argued that semantics plays a key role in language use and that understanding the semantic relationships between words is essential for effective language use. Kapil Kapoor is a scholar of linguistics and literature who is recently honoured with Padma Bhushan for Literature & Education. In one of his journal articles he has argued that understanding the meaning of words and phrases in English is essential for effective language use and that semantics should be a central component of ELT curriculum. Further he believes that the

traditional approach to teaching vocabulary, which involves memorising a list of words, is not sufficient. Instead, he advocates for a more holistic approach to teaching semantics in ELT, where learners are exposed to the language in context. This involves teaching vocabulary in sentences and texts, so learners can see how words are used in different situations. He also emphasizes the importance of teaching cultural context alongside semantics. He argues that language is deeply connected to culture and that learners need to understand the cultural context in which words are used to communicate effectively in English. However keeping the significance of Semantics aside, there are still some major gaps that needs to be addressed, for example The impact of culture on understanding, Methods for Teaching Semantics in ELT, so on and so forth.

### Role of Semantics in ELT:

Semantics aims to improve communication and thinking by emphasising the importance of understanding the relationship between language, thought, and the external world. It also emphasizes on the use of precise language, recognizing the limitations of language to accurately convey meaning, and avoiding the pitfalls of language that can lead to misunderstandings. Alfred Korzybski In his book '*Manhood of Humanity: The Science and Art of Human Engineering*'. Which was published in 1921 talks about structural differential which helps individuals to become aware of the relationship between language and thought. The structural differential is a diagram that represents the process of abstraction, or the way we form mental concepts from our perceptions of the external world. It consists of a series of levels, each representing a different degree of abstraction, and is divided into four levels:



Korzybski,A.(1925). "Structural differential"

Saussure,F.(1916). "Signifier/ Signified"

1. Event level: The level of direct sensory experience, represented by the bottom part.
2. Object level: The level of concrete objects and their qualities, represented by the second part.
3. Label level: The level of words and symbols that represent objects and qualities, represented by the third part.
4. Abstract level: The level of abstract concepts and generalisations, represented by the top part.

The structural differential emphasizes that language is a tool for abstraction, and that different levels of abstraction require different modes of thinking and communication. It highlights the importance of recognizing the limitations of language and the need for precision in communication. Further the structural differential is a useful tool for understanding the relationship between language and thought and for improving communication skills. However, it is questionable that whether Korzybski has read Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of Signified and Signifier or not. Ferdinand de Saussure also talks about the psychological aspect of grasping a meaning where signifier means which can be seen or experienced through different senses and signified means conceptual idea.

For instance, let's understand few lines which is written by Wendell Berry,

“Born by our birth,  
Here on the earth.  
Our flesh to wear,  
Our death to bear” (Berry,2013)

These lines can be interpreted through different aspects which relay on the context and it also depends on where we're discussing these lines. One interpretation can acquire through its literal meaning and another can be through its sense. Here signifier is basic words like Born, Earth, Death, Wear, Bear but Signified will be different from person to person.

Another example can be a word 'Sorry' which means to apologise but when it is used in different context it refers to different meaning for instance if two people are having conversation and one of them say Sorry and on another side a doctor say sorry after performing a surgery on patient-literal meaning will remain same but the sense or intension behind using

this word will be different. Phrases like “She can’t bear a child” does not mean she can’t handle or manage a child but it means she can’t give a birth to a child. When it comes language which has different meanings like I. A. Richards in his essay ‘*Four kinds of meanings*’ talk about mainly four types of meanings Sense, Feeling, Tone and Intension -how it differs from one to another. Furthermore, for instance representation of colours in literature stands for different meanings and senses. To improvise the understanding of semantics there are three theories (A)The referential theory to meaning which gives reference to understand the meaning, (B)The non-referential theory to meaning which means understanding a word as it is and (C) The generative grammarian theory to meaning which means to understand meaning according to grammar structure. Semantics have different types but there are mainly four types of semantics and understanding these different types of semantics can help ELT learners to better comprehend and use English in a variety of contexts. Semantics is a complex and multifaceted field, but it is essential for English language learners to develop a strong understanding of the meaning of words and phrases in order to communicate effectively. By understanding the different aspects of semantics, learners can improve their ability to understand and use language in a variety of contexts.

1. Lexical Semantics: This refers to the meaning of individual words and how they relate to one another. This includes knowledge of the denotative (idea people connect with words) and connotative (meaning which is suggested by words) meanings of words, their collocations, and idiomatic expressions
2. Pragmatics: This refers to the study of language use in context, including the intentions behind what is said, and the social and cultural factors that affect how language is used. It includes knowledge of conversational implicature, speech acts, and discourse analysis.
3. Cognitive Semantics: This refers to the study of how people conceptualise and categorise the world around them through language. It includes knowledge of metaphor, metonymy, and mental spaces.
4. Formal Semantics: This refers to the study of the logical structure of language, including the relationship between words, phrases, and sentences, and how meaning is derived from these structures.

As semantic plays a significant role in ELT but like any other teaching method, it has its own advantages and disadvantages.

**Advantages:**

**Enhanced vocabulary development:** Semantics understanding can help learners to build a strong vocabulary. When learners understand the meaning of words and phrases, they can use them in context and remember them more easily.

**Improved reading comprehension:** Semantics understanding can improve learners' reading comprehension skills. By understanding the meaning of words and phrases in context, learners can better comprehend written texts.

**Better communication skills:** Semantics understanding can help learners to communicate more effectively. When learners understand the meaning of words and phrases, they can use them more accurately and appropriately in different contexts.

**Cultural awareness:** Semantics understanding can also enhance learners' cultural awareness. By understanding the cultural context of words and phrases, learners can better communicate with people from different cultures.

#### **Disadvantages:**

**Time-consuming:** Semantics teaching can be time-consuming, as learners need to spend time learning the meanings of words and phrases in different contexts. This may not be feasible in some ELT contexts where time is limited.

**Overemphasis on memorisation:** Semantics teaching may sometimes overemphasise memorisation of vocabulary lists, which can be tedious and boring for students.

**Limited scope:** Semantics teaching may have a limited scope, as it may not be able to cover all the possible meanings and uses of words and phrases. Which is concerned with age group of students and also from which stream they're.

**Insufficient attention to other language skills:** Semantics teaching may sometimes come at the expense of other language skills, such as grammar, pronunciation, and writing.

#### **Tools and methods**

**Contextualisation:** Semantics can be taught by providing learners with real-world examples of words and phrases used in different contexts. This can help learners to understand the meaning of words and phrases and use them appropriately in different situations. Also, mother tongue language for concept base will help learners to understand meaning of subject which is given to them.

**Semantic mapping:** Semantic mapping is a visual tool that can be used to help learners understand the relationships between words and their meanings. Semantic maps can help

learners to organise their understanding of words and phrases and visualise the connections between them.

**Word webs:** Word webs are another visual tool that can be used to teach semantics. Word webs are diagrams that show the relationships between words and their meanings. They can help learners to see the connections between words and develop a deeper understanding of their meanings.

**Semantic feature analysis:** Semantic feature analysis is a method that involves breaking down words into their constituent parts and analyzing their features. This can help learners to understand the meaning of words and how they relate to other words. Which can be taught through developing critical thinking skill.

**Semantic games and activities:** Semantics can also be taught through games and activities that involve using words and phrases in different contexts. For example, learners can play word association games, where they have to come up with words that are related to a given word or phrase. For instance, finding words from units which are similar but used differently or there can be a list of comparative questions which can be asked to students.

**Semantic exercises:** Semantics can also be taught through exercises like creative writing which focus on specific aspects of word meaning, such as synonyms, antonyms, and homophones.

**Text analysis:** Learners can be asked to analyse the meaning of texts by identifying the different semantic features that are used in the text. This can help learners to understand how meaning is conveyed in different types of texts.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, semantics teaching can have many advantages and it may also have some disadvantages. It is important for ELT practitioners to balance the advantages and disadvantages of semantics teaching and integrate it effectively into their language teaching curriculum. semantics is an important part of English language teaching. By understanding the meaning of words and phrases, learners can improve their ability to communicate effectively in a variety of contexts. By undertaking needful analysis of the students of the class a teacher

can make a effective use of these tools of semantics to improve the target language of students. Thus, appropriate use of above-mentioned tools will help to improve both teaching and learning experience by teachers and students. It also help learners to develop a deeper understanding of word meaning and use words more effectively in different contexts. Language is all about expressing or communicating the ideas or emotions and semantic teaching improves the ability of understanding the actual meaning of words in particular context so the communication of the ideas can be performed well.

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