Monosemie bei Charles Ruhl

I  Assumptions

(A1) **The Monosemic Bias**
First Hypothesis: A word has a single meaning.
Second Hypothesis: If a word has more than one meaning, its meanings are related by general rules.

(A2) Definitions confuse inherent lexical meaning (semantics) with meaning provided by context (semantic & pragmatic).

(A3) Neither intuition nor usage alone is sufficient as a source of data. Theories require intuitional judgements, so usage is insufficient; but consciousness always underestimates the relevant evidence, so intuition is insufficient.

(A4) The Chomskyan idealisation [IDEAL] is a highly abstract 'core' of strong systems, which are modulated by external concretions, with the effect of weakening systems, to full realistic linguistic variability: diachronic, referential, figuratively open, specific languages/ dialects/ registers/ idiolects. All linguistic realities are enabled by modular idealisation. The more abstract an idealisation, the more likely it will mistakenly include realities explicable only on a more inclusive, modulated idealisation.

(A5) Within a multidimensional mandatory context (lack of context is impossible), the inherent sense of a word or expression is always modulated pragmatically.

(A6) The fundamental unconscious capacities are relatively immutable, strongly systematic & closed; these extend progressively to conscious capacities that are mutable, weakly systematic & open. A word's general meaning may not be definable in conscious categories (other than by itself); however, with abundant data, consciousness can infer the range & limits of the meaning.

(A7) A field of related words exhibits a closed-to-open continuum, paralleling unconscious-conscious: e.g., colours diversify from primes black & white, through primaries red, yellow, green & blue & eventually to secondary colours like cinnamon. The field is potentially open, but rooted in series of closed classes.

(A8) The full vocabulary of a language is a semantic field, rooted in closed (minor, grammatical) classes. Each open (major, lexical) class of words roots in primary subclasses (be – do – have – go are the primary verbs).

(A9) The semantic fields combine semantic & pragmatic. The more primary (closed-class) a word, the more completely semantic its definition; its role is essentially intralinguistic, minimally relating to reality. The less primary (open-class) a word, the less semantic (& more pragmatic) its definition; its role is essentially extralinguistic, its definition largely a 'real' definition, describing properties of a real-world referent. A vocabulary as a whole is not modularly autonomous.

(A10) The less primary a word, the more it is related directly to externalities; the more so, the more open it is to figurative extensions, based on that reality. The more primary a word, the less directly related to externalities & thus the less possibility of figurativity.

II  Consciousness vs. Unconsciousness

3.1  Conscious Distortions

(1) Preoccupation with referential words reveals an exaggerated reliance on 'methods of conscious thought'.

(2) As we consciously attempt to discover order in language, we are confronted with systems & categories that are largely unknown & perhaps unknowable in conscious terms.

(3) Habit of consciousness has been to impose its narrow range of systems & categories on the whole of language, with any resulting deficiencies of theory (such as widespread multiple meaning) attributed to the language itself.

3.2  Unconscious Distortions

(1) Closed classes are evidence of the unconscious; conversely, the open classes are proportionally conscious & accordingly easier to understand.

(2) Oversimplification comes from the unconscious: we invoke closure, a finite set of choices, where the language in fact does not exhibit them; we overanalyse, but in a constrained way: by dividing a unity into a few parts, we fail to recognize that the unity implies an infinite number of specifics.

(3) Semantic distinctions can be correlated with formal distinctions, but they must be established first.

III  Roles of Semantics & Pragmatics

2.1  Semantics

(1) Semantics of a word (its lexical meaning) is that part of its meaning that remains constant in varying contexts.

(2) Semantics of a word is highly abstract & underspecified.

(3) Lexical items as structured by syntax contribute compositionally to the meaning of a sentence.

2.2  Pragmatics

(1) Interpretation of a sentence differs from what is determined by syntax & lexical meaning.

(2) The meaning of compositionally derived sentence can then be altered in a number of ways:
Pragmatic Metonymy
A general inference that supplies appropriate contiguous circumstances.

Pragmatic Specialisation
We think of a particular kind of action (expressed by the verb) appropriate to the conditions that are (apparently) described.

Pragmatic Generalisation
Operates in parallel fashion to Pragmatic Specialisation, though with an opposite result.

Listing pragmatic rules may be an infinite task: all knowledge of the world can be included.

Concretion Condition
The degree of concretion will be computed pragmatically, appropriate to the apparent message & references being conveyed.

Agency Condition
The degree of agency is computed pragmatically, appropriate to the message & references being conveyed. Agency favours active over inactive, animate over inanimate, deliberate over non-deliberate. Subject position typically invites a high agency computation.

Movement Condition
The relevance, degree, direction, rate & specific means of movement are computed pragmatically, appropriate to the apparent message & references being conveyed. Movement is both concrete & abstract.

IV Stereotypes & Prototypes

4.1 Stereotypes
(1) Stereotyping is modulation that isn’t recognised as such: we think we are seeing wholly when we are seeing only in part.

(2) Stereotypes are ‘favoured’ pragmatic inferences: sometimes they are triggered by lexical contexts & sometimes they seem to operate ‘in isolation’; in the latter, they are the possibility that springs first to mind when we think of the word

4.2 Prototypes
(1) Prototypes are also stereotypes, pragmatic & not semantic; they do not strictly compose, since various combinations evoke different realities.

(2) Categories are organised around prototypic & peripheral terms. These organisations are pragmatic.

V Figurativity & Idiomaticity

5.1 Figurativity
- highly concrete & referential words can be figurative
- Three possibilities for figurative uses

(1) The figure is pragmatic, not yet conventionalised (as the use of door to refer to a communicating person)

(2) The figure is semantic & can be inferred unidirectionally from the ground (as the use of ice to refer to diamonds)

(3) The figure is semantic & could be the ground for the other sense, the inference being bi-directional & so each sense being independent (as with orange).
- Only with (3) should a word be considered polysemic; with (2) we still have monosemy & the variation in meaning follows from the definition of axiomatic lexical shape.
- One indication for (3) (or even homonymy) would be syntactic patterning that differs in unpredictable ways from ground to figure

5.2 Idiomaticity
(1) An idiom is an expression whose words occur elsewhere but never with the same (inherent) meaning as in this expression.

(2) Idiomaticity cannot be directly, immediately & obviously judged; rather, it should be concluded only after an exhaustive & finally futile, investigation that finds no linguistic unities.

VI Problems

(P1) Ruhl does not actually propose how the single, abstract, underspecified meaning of a lexical item might look like.

(P2) As a consequence of (A2), for the examples he looks at, Ruhl does not try to give a definition of the meaning of these lexical items.

(P3) Not clear how pragmatic rules apply to the lexical meaning of an item to yield its possible different readings

(P4) No interpretation process is proposed that would yield the individual readings of a lexical item.

(P5) Opinion on the relationship of semantics & pragmatics is ambivalent.

Literatur