A semantic analysis of sense relations in dictionary definitions and English textbooks

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Contents

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[1] Please note: This is the typical chapter structure of an empirical linguistic paper. However, the number of chapters, subchapters etc. ultimately depends on your paper topic, its complexity etc. So it may, for example, happen that you are not required to do an empirical study in an introductory proseminar like Systemic Linguistics. This would mean that after Chapter 2 where you would define, explain and illustrate the relevant concepts with examples that you explain, the Conclusion could be your next chapter. The Bibliography is obligatory, the Appendix optional. And it is also important to know that if your paper focusses on two main concepts, you might prefer to have two chapters providing background information (so Chapter 2 and Chapter 3) instead of just one (Chapter 2). It is recommendable to structure the content of a chapter by using subchapters and possibly sub-subchapters. Again this is very much dependent on your paper topic and its complexity. If you decide to use subchapters, make sure that there are at least two of them in one chapter. In other words, if you only plan to have one subchapter in your Chapter 2 which then would receive the chapter number 2.1, rather provide this information in Chapter 2 without any subchapters (unless you plan to have at least another subchapter 2.2). In the proseminar/seminar in which you have to write a term paper, you might receive additional, more specific guidelines. Make sure you respect them (in addition to the suggestions in this sample paper and those in the Style Sheet for Linguistics).

1. Introduction

In the Introduction you should express the topic of your paper (incl. research question(s)/hypothesis) and your motivation (not too personal), and you should give an overview of the content of the following chapters of the main part. This could be done e.g. in the following form: Chapter 2 provides a definition of semantics and highlights the differences between semantics and other linguistic subdisciplines such as morphology and pragmatics. In addition, it describes and explains a number of sense relations. In Chapter 3, methods and material of the empirical research are discussed…

You would not include the bibliography or the appendix in this overview. What constitutes an optional feature of the introduction of linguistic papers is the mentioning of possible further directions for research. Sometimes, an introduction will also include a reference to limitations of your paper, i.e. aspects that might be interesting and relevant but cannot be dealt with e.g. for reasons of scope, time etc.

When it comes to choosing a topic for your paper, there are several strategies you could possibly use: making use of topic suggestions by the course instructor; personal interest and experience; using secondary sources (articles, monographs, research done by other people which you, of course, must not just simply copy/reproduce – plagiarism!) as source of inspiration (e.g. looking at the further reading sections/bibliographies etc.). No matter how you select a topic, make sure that it is related to the course topic/context and that it is manageable (scope, time, accessibility/collection of data/material etc.) in the given context of e.g. a proseminar etc. It is always recommendable – especially if you are not fully certain about the appropriateness of your topic − to discuss your idea with your instructor before you start your research.

2. What is semantics?

Chapter 2 provides the background/theoretical information that is relevant for your empirical study. Here you need to describe, explain and ideally illustrate (with appropriate examples) the concepts/terms/aspects that are of major importance for your paper. The title of your paper can be a good indicator of the terms/aspects you should

mention/clarify in this chapter before you apply them in your analysis. If you e.g. investigate particular sense relations used in dictionary definitions, categorising and explaining those sense relations should certainly be a part of this chapter. Appropriately and logically organize the information in this chapter and all the following chapters through paragraphs and − if suitable − subchapters. The information below also applies to all of the chapters in your paper:

The beginning of a new paragraph has to be marked. This is done by indenting the first line by 1.25 cm.

Pay attention to correctly marking object language and meaning in your paper. In linguistics, this is of utmost importance. So if you want to indicate that what you say refers to a word/expression/sentence and not to the thing etc. it refers to in the world, use italics. Here is an example: *Semantics* is the name of one of the core subdisciplines of linguistics. If you provide the meaning of an expression etc., put it inside single inverted commas: *Linguistic* means 'concerned with the study of language'.

The correct integration of direct (word by word) and indirect quotations is another very important feature of a good and successful linguistic paper. For direct quotations, you use quotation marks: "xxxxxx". For indirect quotations where you paraphrase another author's idea in your own words, you don't. However, regardless of whether you use direct (which should be used sparingly) or indirect quotations, in both cases you have to indicate the source of this piece of information. In linguistics, you do this by means of in-text references at the end of your quotation which take the following form: (Surname of the author Year of publication, page number). Please study the style sheet for papers in linguistics (available on the homepage of the English department) where you get additional and more detailed information on quoting/references and other important aspects of term paper writing.

Make sure the information you provide in your paper is complete, correct, clear and concrete (= explicit).

2.1 Definition

Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text.

2.2 Distinctions

Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text.

2.2.1 Semantics vs. morphology

Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text.

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3. Methods and Material

This is a very essential chapter for all empirical papers, i.e. papers where you analyse texts/a collection of texts (corpus) or other linguistic data. This type of paper thus needs to be distinguished from so-called *review papers* (more common in introductory courses such as Systemic Linguistics) where you rather define and explain specific linguistic phenomena often or typically supported by individual examples that you explain to illustrate a certain concept. Such a paper is more like an extended summary of linguistic information with some illustrative examples. A theoretical paper − without a corpus-based text-analytical approach − is rather rare in linguistics. Most of your linguistic papers produced at university will have a text-analytical, empirical focus and apply specific theories to concrete textual material.

In the field of empirical papers, we further can distinguish between quantitative and qualitative papers. In a quantitative study you typically try to quantify certain aspects, e.g.: the frequency of occurrence of a particular linguistic aspect in a particular text genre. A qualitative study is rather not interested in answering quantitative questions (*How often?* etc.) but rather wants to investigate the quality of a particular phenomenon, e.g. in which types/forms it occurs. Don't forget: Quantitative and qualitative studies can be combined in one paper. And remember: Your paper can also have a comparative focus, e.g. if you compare/contrast different linguistic phenomena in

one and the same text or one and the same aspect in different texts/genres/periods (diachronic research) etc.

Let's now concentrate on the typical content of Chapter 3. In this chapter you answer two important questions the reader might want to ask: a) What/Which texts etc. do you analyse (= Material); and b) How do you analyze your material (= Methods). If we take the example of the topic of this sample paper, it is obvious that the dictionary/dictionaries you will analyse as well as the textbooks should be mentioned and described/characterized.

When it comes to the methods of your research, say how you analyse your material, e.g. how you selected the definitions/parts to analyse (e.g. all the definitions of all words starting with *D*; specific sections in the textbooks etc.). Did you use any computer program to help you analyse the texts? If yes, which and how? etc.

3.1 Material
3.1.1 Dictionary XY

Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text.

3.1.2 Textbook XY

Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text.

……

3.2 Methods

Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text Text.

4. Results

When presenting the results of your empirical research/analysis, you can separate the description of your findings (Chapter 4. Results) from the interpretation of those findings (Chapter 5. Discussion). Or you can combine them in one chapter – then logically organizing the information in appropriate subchapters.

If you have quantitative results, you may in addition to a verbal description opt for a graphical representation through graphs, tables etc. For all illustrations, screenshots, graphs, pictures etc. in your whole paper, provide captions! You have to number the figures consecutively and combine the numbering with a short title and – if taken from a secondary source − with an in-text reference in parentheses. Here is an example:
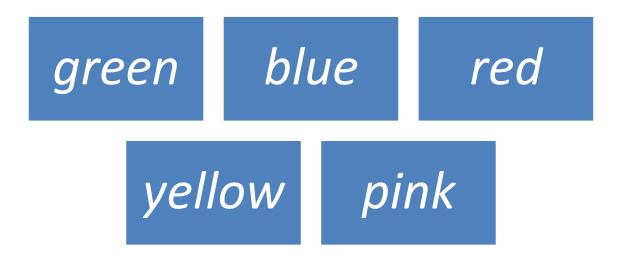

Fig. 1: Words exemplifying the sense relation of multiple incompatibility (Surname Year, page)

If it should happen that your source is an Internet document where no author, no year of publication and no page number is provided – but the information still seems reliable, trustworthy and useful, you could produce an in-text reference like (N.N. n.d., n.p.). This would be according to the rules but not really informative to the reader – or even confusing as soon as you have two such sources that are different but still would receive

the same in-text reference; so in this case, the Internet address – or a shortened version of it – or also the title of the website/document might instead be put in parentheses. No matter which of these options you choose, be consistent!

Pay attention to argument-evidence structure (important for all chapters): When you make a claim, support it by e.g. a result from your research, an appropriate example, a relevant quotation from a secondary source etc. Expressions like *seems*, *may be* etc. can be useful if you e.g. are rather convinced that this could be an explanation of a certain finding but you don't have the ultimate piece of evidence. Through expressions like these (which of course should not be overused) you decrease the strength of your argument and also your responsibility but still can provide the reader with this piece of information.

Do not overgeneralize! If e.g. you have found that the sense relation of hyponymy is used more frequently in the definitions you analyzed than e.g. synonymy, this is an interesting result that you should mention but in the right context. So it would be problematic to make the following claim: *The sense relation of hyponymy is used more often than synonymy in dictionary definitions.* Unless your corpus is representative and the finding statistically significant, such a statement is too far-reaching. To achieve representativeness is a difficult thing, especially in the context of e.g. a proseminar paper where it is hardly ever possible to investigate a text collection large enough to achieve representative results (unless your corpus is very specific and includes e.g. all the five texts that exist of this type/genre).

As far as the chapter structure is concerned, two main subchapter organizations can be imagined for Chapter 4 of this sample paper. One would be to put the texts that were analysed on a superordinate level and the sense relations on a subordinate level or vice versa. This would result in the following chapter division. Here option 1:

4.1 Dictionary XY

4.1.1 Sense relation 1

4.1.2 Sense relation 2

…

4.2 Textbook XY

4.2.1 Sense relation 1

4.2.2 Sense relation 2

…

And here option 2:

4.1 Sense relation 1

4.1.1 Dictionary XY

4.1.2 Textbook XY

…

4.2 Sense relation 2

4.2.1 Dictionary XY

4.2.2 Textbook XY

…

5. Discussion

If you decide to separate the description of your results (Chapter 4) from the interpretation/explanation/discussion of these results (Chapter 5), it would be systematic and consistent and thus recommendable to stick – as far as this is useful and suitable – to the subchapter structure of the Results chapter. So if you have started the Results chapter with a description of hyponymy, it would make sense to adopt this structure also in the Discussion chapter and not, for example, start the latter with meronymy.

6. Conclusion

While the Methods and Material chapter, the Results and Discussion sections need not be part of every linguistic paper (ultimately depends on the nature (empirical or not) and complexity (introductory or not) of the paper), the conclusion is an obligatory element of all linguistic papers. It serves one main function: to sum up the main aspects/findings of the preceding pages of your paper. It normally should not contain any new information but rather summarize important information given before. To summarize this information, you should not simply use the exact same sentences/wording you used in previous chapters – unless you include technical terms ('Fachbegriffe') which, of course, must stay the same.

In length, the conclusion is similar to the introduction. Of course, the length primarily depends on the topic and the complexity of the paper, but in general half a page to 1 page (maximum) should be sufficient for a proseminar paper. Don't make the conclusion too personal (e.g. *I really enjoyed writing about sense relations*) but focus on facts.

Sometimes the conclusion can also have a second function in addition to that of a summary: it may provide an outlook on potentially interesting directions for further research in the topical field of your paper.

Bibliography

The bibliography usually does not receive a chapter number. It starts on a new page, is ordered alphabetically and follows the regulations stated in the Style Sheet for Linguistics. It differs from the preceding chapters in so far as it has single line spacing instead of 1.5. It must include all the sources you used and referred to in your paper! You must not refer to any sources in your paper that are not listed in the bibliography. Please study the style sheet: (https://www.uni-salzburg.at/fileadmin/multimedia/Anglistik%20 und%20Amerikanistik/documents/Leselsiten_Stylesheets/Style_Sheet_Ling_2015.pdf) for learning how different types of publications are entered in the bibliography and having a look at a sample bibliography.

The Internet is an overwhelmingly rich source of texts, articles etc. However, sometimes it can happen that a text that is reliable, trustworthy and useful for your paper does not give an author nor a date of publication. How should such a text be integrated in the bibliography? If there is no author, use N.N. instead; if there is no date, use n.d.; if the text has no specific title, leave this part out and only state the name of the website. This might produce an entry such as the following:

N.N. (n.d.) *Semantics on the internet* [WWW document].
    <www.thisisnorealwebsite.com> [27 Mar. 2018].

The Internet is rich in texts of a lot of different types and genres. If there is no separate model entry for your text type/genre in the Style Sheet, use the general format for Internet documents whenever possible and adapt it to the document in question. Be consistent. If we take the example of an e-mail, here is a suggestion:

Smith, Sue (25 Mar. 2018) Title/Subject of the e-mail, *sue.smith@sbg.ac.at* [WWW document]. <https://webmail.sbg.ac.at> [27 Mar. 2018].

Or here a model entry for a tweet:

APA Style (22 Nov. 2016) Research and writing, *Twitter* [WWW document].
    <https://twitter.com/i/moments/801080248762847234> [27 Mar. 2018].

Appendix

This is an optional part of your paper. Here you may e.g. include copies of all the texts you analysed, especially if it is a large number of texts − too large to directly place them into one of the chapters of the main part. It does not include new arguments but rather information/texts etc. referred to/addressed/analysed in the preceding chapters but too extensive, numerous etc. to be included (in full form) in those chapters. Therefore they are collected in a separate chapter – the Appendix.