NATURE AND TYPES OF LINGUISTIC MEANING
COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

- Communication - intentional transfer of info.; primary function of language
- Meaning includes choice: possibility of choice is a necessary condition of meaningfulness
- “communicative” - what has meaning for the sender
- “informative” - what has meaning for the receiver
“information” can refer to:
a) signal information: physical characteristics of the signal (acoustic and visual information)
b) semantic information: meaning of the signal
3 basic functions of language:

1. descriptive - info. explicitly confirmed or denied (referential/cognitive/propositional)

2. social - maintaining social relationships

3. expressive - self-expression
NATURE OF MEANING

- two-way approach to meaning:
  1. sign = language (form) + content

- three-way approach to meaning:
  1. sign = language (form) + thought + reality

Ogden & Richards: meaning is a process which goes on by the interaction of the mental picture with reality
WHAT IS MEANING AND HOW DO WE DEFINE IT?

- General agreement: PROCESS
- Semantic tradition: promentalist and antimentalist theories
- Antimentalist t.: negative towards reference (thought)-individual and inaccessible
- O & R: ANALYTIC RIGOUR
no one definite answer to the question of meaning (both a ling. and psycho. problem)

Meaning is limited by:
1. **conceptualization** (mental images)
2. **environment** (e.g. Eskimos)
3. **culture** (e.g. Croatian and English kinship terms)
O & R give a list of definitions of meaning- partial focus

- insistence on **analytical rigour**: application of strict rules;
  looseness of meaning

- after this plea- negative stands towards mentalism
structuralism: l. as a set of STRICT rules; incapable of dealing with meaning

“the problem of m. is that it will escape any cage you put it in” (G. Sampson: *Making Sense*, 1981)

culmination of struct.: L. Bloomfield: *Language* (1933) (“Meaning”): relied on natural sciences for meaning (e.g. meaning of ‘salt’: NaCl vs white powder you put in food; ‘love’ and ‘hate’)

death penalty for semantics (“Cinderella of linguistics”)

TYPES OF LINGUISTIC MEANING: CONCEPTUAL/PRIMAR Y/BASIC VS SECONDARY TYPES

- **CONCEPTUAL M.**: dictionary or literal m. of a word; core m.; relatively *(not absolutely)* constant & stable
  - changes in time; differences between cult.
  - e.g. Dr. Johnson’s and modern definition of c. meaning of ‘woman’
  - certain aspects are fixed: always human, adult, female (-male)
  - no secondary m. without conceptual
SECONDARY TYPES OF MEANING

1. **STYLISTIC** - what is comm. of the social circumstances of l. use; styl. features of words

- l. use: formal, neutral, informal (casual) in s.

  e.g. **horse**/steed/nag/gee-gee

  **home**/residence/abode/domicile

  **small**/tiny/diminutive/wee

  **throw**/cast/chuck
2. **AFFECTIVE** - part of m. which conveys emotions and attitudes of the l. user; what is comm. of the feelings and attitudes of the speaker/writer; basic facility: **intonation**

e.g. *You’re a viscous tyrant and I hate you for it!*

*I’m terribly sorry to interrupt you, but would you be so kind enough and lower your voice?*
3. **REFLECTED** - what is comm. through the association with another sense of the same expression

- e.g. taboo words - traditionally stigmatized (sex, erection, intercourse, the Holy Ghost)

When a word acquires taboo m. (powerful), primary m. gradually disappears
4. COLLOCATIVE - what is comm. through the association with words which tend to occur in the environment of another word; that part of the word m. suggested by the words that go before or come after it arises on the syntagmatic level e.g. Adj+N
pretty+girl, woman, flower, garden...
*pretty+boy (handsome)
handsome+boy, man, overcoat, vessel...
*handsome+woman

N+V

Cows wandered across the field.
*Cows strolled across the field.
always conceptual m. + secondary m.

How do British define Americans?
born in the USA (CM)
brash, boastful, materialistic (SM)

How do Americans define Americans?
born in the USA (CM)
generous, fair, busy (SM)
LINGUISTIC SIGN

Instead of relating things and words directly, we can relate them through the mediation of concepts of the mind.

2 versions of this view:
1. SIGN THEORY of Ferdinand de Saussure
2. SEMIOTIC TRIANGLE of O & R
De Saussure’s l. sign = SIGNIFIER + SIGNIFIED (sound image + concept)

The two are linked by a psychological ‘associative’ bond. Both elements of a linguistic sign are psychological in nature and connected in our minds by means of association. The meaning of any sign— in the association between the sound image and the concept
Linguistic sign doesn’t connect one thing and one name, but a concept and a sound (acoustic) image.

Acoustic image - not a material sound (physical entity), but a psychological impression of that sound. Its psychological nature: talking to yourself without moving a. organs.

Replacing terms: instead of concept-signifié (signified); sound image-signifiant (signifier)
2 BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DE SAUSSURE’ S L. SIGN

1. ARBITRARITY-the link between signifier and signified (i.e. l. sign) is arbitrary. The concept “cat” doesn’t have any internal link with the sequence of sounds c-a-t. Instead of this sequence of sounds, you can connect e.g. m-a-č-k-a with the same concept. Arbitrarity leads to **ambiguity** and **multiplicity of meaning** (a single signifier associated with more than one signified)

2. LINEARITY OF THE SIGNIFIER (sound image)-signifier has an acoustic and a temporal nature and therefore represents a stretch in time and space. Signifier exists in time and that time can be measured as linear (not being able to utter or write 2 words at the exact same time).
His contribution to the investigation of paradigmatic meaning relations - the notion of **value**

- signs can exist only in opposition to other signs - their meaning depends on their value relationships to other signs (e.g. the kinship terminology).
O & R triangle:
SYMBOL- l. element (word, sentence)
REFERENT-object in the world of experience
THOUGHT (REFERENCE)-mind concept

No direct link between symbol (language) and referent (world), the link is via thought (reference; concepts in our minds)
What is de Saussure’s associative bond or Ogden & Richards’ link between symbol and concept?

- Naive and unsatisfactory view: the link is psychological (when we think of a name, we think of a concept and vice-versa)

- A more plausible view: we do not make this link every time we use a word; the link is a permanent association stored in the mind

- Neither can be accepted: if there are concepts in the mind, they are accessible only to the individual, so we are left with subjective views

- Furthermore, meaning is not some entity that words ‘have’ in any literal sense of ‘having’ (words have meanings ≠ people have legs).
3 GROUPS OF APPROACHES TO MEANING

1. **symbol (lexeme)**- concentration on the lexeme as a part of the system of language
   John Lyons: meanings are learnt via connection to the m. of other words
   But, how do we learn the m. of basic words?
e.g. scarlet-red
2. lexical concept (Fillmore, Lakoff, Wierzbicka)-meanings of words are learnt by means of their lexical concepts

- no denial of the importance of lexical interrelationships, but not enough

- the dominant view today
3. denotatum (referent)- Bloomfield explains the meaning of the word ‘salt’ by using the formula NaCl. But, what about lexemes such as ‘love’?