

# Meaning 1.1: Word meaning

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# Reasoning about the world at large

One of the most interesting parts of language is its use to reason about the world at large.

Morphemes have meanings; we add them together to make words with (more or different) meaning; we string words together to convey complicated things about the world; we deploy certain strings of words in any given situation to obtain a desired outcome.

Our job is to find the systematicity in this pipeline.

# Taking stock

What type of things do we mean when we utter something? What are we to even study?

Let's start at the word and phrase level... What do words mean?

- (i) *dog* — a four legged mammal, which is genetically close to wolves  
*dog* — someone who is a very tough competitor at something
- (ii) *famous* — well known for something (usually good)  
*infamous* — well known for something (almost always bad)
- (iii) *the morning star* — the bright star that rises in the morning = Venus  
*the evening star* — the bright star that rises in the evening = Venus

## Contextual (in)dependence

Crucial thing to observe about previous slide is that meaning often, but not always, interacts with **context**.

- (i) Use of *dog* in a particular context governs whether you use literal or metaphorical meaning.
- (ii) The words *infamous* and *famous* essentially have a same core meaning but have very different connotations because their uses are restricted to certain contexts.
- (iii) Expressions used in different contexts but mean exactly the same thing.

## Pushing harder on (iii)

- The morning star is Venus.
- The evening star is Venus.
- The morning star is the evening star.
- The morning star is the morning star.
- The evening star is the evening star.

Do these sentences have the same meaning?

# Gottlob Frege (1848-1952)



- A very famous philosopher and logician
- Philosophy of Language
- Logic
- Predicate calculus

# Sense: Frege's Solution

An expression gives rise to **reference** if uttering that expression “indicates” a particular **entity** (i.e., object or individual)

Frege says the following:

- The morning star and the evening star have the same **reference**.
- But the two phrases have different **senses**.
- *the morning star* — the bright star that rises in the early morning
- *the evening star* — the bright star that rises in the early evening

# Sense and reference

"The Morning Star is the Morning Star."

"The Morning Star is the Evening Star."

"Venus is Venus."





# Stringing meanings together

## Know:

- (i) single words have some meaning, which can vary by context — meaning comes from world, external to language
- (ii) sets of words with different 'lower-level' (sense) meanings can have same 'higher-level' meaning (reference)

## Don't know:

- (i) How we get these 'lower-level' meanings
- (ii) How we get sentence meanings by combining word and phrase meaning
- (iii) What sentences even mean

## Preview: sentence meaning

These examples are beyond what we can explain now — all different types of sentence meaning. We need to look closer into these. Next video.

(i) *Every student didn't pass the exam.*

. Nobody passed the exam

**or**

. Some people passed the exam, but not everybody.

(ii) *My firetruck broke down on my way to school today.*

. I have a firetruck.

(iii) *Can you pass me the salt?*

. I want you to pass me the salt.

End of this video's material.