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Cognition, Synonymy and Definitions

Abstract

In this paper. I would like to show that all the existing dictionaries are insufficient for defining some synonymous words. Relevance Theory (proposed by Sperber and Wilson 1986) can capture the similarities and differences of some synonymous words not as 'conceptual' but as 'procedural' meanings. This newly developed cognitive analysis can be extended to provide the true definitions for synonymous words such as X *but/except for/except* Y, *too/also* and *huh/eh*.

1. Introduction

According to Wilson and Sperber (1993:2), the meaning of a linguistic expression is conceptual if it encodes a concept; procedural if it encodes information about computations. In Section 2, we shall deal with connectives *but/except for/except* which can be considered to introduce a certain kind of elimination. In Section 3, the difference between *too* and *also* will be discussed. These two particles indicate parallel processing (cf. Blakemore 1992:143). In Section 4, the dissociative particle *huh* and the question particle *eh* will be investigated. Some dictionaries define *huh* and *eh* as synonymous, but we shall show the differences between the two from a relevance–theoretic point of view.

2. X *but/except for/except* Y

2.1. Dictionary definitions

    (1)   Everyone was there *but* him.

OALD4 defines *but* in (1) as a preposition which means "except (somebody, something)".

    (2)   a. Everyone was tired *except* John.–*LDELC*
          b. *Except for* one old lady, the bus was empty.
          c. Everyone was tired *except for* John.

The word *except* in (2a) is defined in *LDELC* as "not including; leaving out;but not". *LDELC* shows that *Except for* in (2b) is used in the sense of "apart from; with the exception of", while the same expression in (2c) is given the definition of "(only before nouns and pronouns) except". The above

definitions for (1) and (2a,b,c) seem to be too vague to understand the difference between *but/except for/except.*

2.2. A relevance–theoretic account

The difference between *but/except for/except* can be clarified by comparison with the possibility of the following data.

(a) <Generalization> *but/except for/except* <Exception>.
(b) <Generalization>. *But/Except for/Except* <Exception>.
(c) But/Except for/Except <Exception><Generalization>.
(d) But/Except for/Except <Exception>.<Generalization>.

> (3)   a. She couldn't eat anything *but* cucumbers.–*COBUILD*
>   b. *She couldn't eat anything. *But* cucumbers.
>   c. **But* cucumbers she couldn't eat anything.
>   d. **But* cucumbers, she couldn't eat anything.

(i) In X *but* Y, the focus is put on Y. In (3a), the assertion is that she ate only cucumbers.
(ii) In X *but* Y, there must be some contrast between X and Y. In (3a), there is a contrast between 'not anything' (=nothing) and 'cucumbers'.

KNOWLEDGE: <She couldn't eat anything> contrasts with <she ate cucumbers>.

(iii) In X *but* Y, the emphasis is on the contrasting set between the exception Y and the generalization X, resulting in the focus of the exception Y.

> (4)   a. She wore no jewellery *except for* a simple band around her wedding finger.–Longman Lancaster Corpus(= L)

KNOWLEDGE: A simple band is not a kind of jewellery.

> b.   It was all neat and tidy, *except for* a saucepan which had boiled milk in it.–*COBUILD* Database(= C)
> c.   Except for emergencies I have found it easier not to expect any help from my children.–COBUILD
> d.   Except for Christmastime, there is not a great deal of gift–giving in the United States.–Lanier, *U.S.A.*, p.16

(i) In X *except for* Y, the focus is put on the generalization X.
(ii) In X of the construction of X *except for* Y, there is no element which is considered to be the same class as Y.

(iii) In X *except for* Y, the exception Y is excluded as the different class from the generalization X.

   (5)   a. Calcium is found in large amounts in all dairy products *except* butter.

KNOWLEDGE: Butter is a kind of dairy product.

         b.PRESCOTT: I misspoke myself. There weren't any bimbos at all.
         BRANTLEY: *Except* Christy.–*The Secret of My Success*, p.73

KNOWLEDGE: Christy is a kind of bimbo.

         c. *Except John and Mary we're all here.–Swan (1984:120)
         d. *Except* Christmas, we had no long holiday.–*Web3*

(i) In X *except* Y, the focus is on the generalization X.
(ii) In X *except* Y, the same kinds as Y are directly or indirectly described in X. (Cf. 'Hyponymy')
(iii) In X *except* Y, the exception Y is excluded as one of the same kinds described in the generalization X from a certain point of view.

2.3. Some problems

2.3.1. Information unit/processing efforts/direction of processing

(i) In X *but* Y, X and Y should be processed as a set at the same time, and so *but* Y cannot be preposed (e.g. 3d) or used as a separate information unit (e.g. 3b)
(ii) In X *except for* Y, *Except for* Y can be preposed (e.g.4c, 4d) since we can easily pick up a different kind from X by using a little processing effort.
(iii) In X *except* Y, there is some difference in acceptability in the preposed utterances (e.g. 5c, 5d), since a great processing effort is necessary to identify the exception in the same kind of objects (which can be regarded as an exception from a certain point of view)

2.3.2. Judgement of the same class

   (6)   a. He ate the meal *except for* the beans.–Swan(1934:96–97)
         b. *He ate the meal *except* the beans.

KNOWLEDGE: The meal and the beans optionally have a part–whole relation.

2.3.3. Quantifiers *(every/most)* and processing effort

(7) a. Everyone disappeared, *except* Felix.–Reinhart (1991:366–367)
     b.*Most/*Many people disappeared, *except* Felix.
(8) a. Everyone came, *but* Bill.–Kempson (1990:18)
     b.*Most of my friends came, *but* Bill.

(9) a. Most values have gone, *except for* the fast buck.–L

KNOWLEDGE: The fast buck is not a kind of value. (different classes)

     b. Most assets, *except* money, suffer some wastage.–L

KNOWLEDGE: Money is a kind of asset. (the same class)

3. *Too/Also*

3.1. *Dictionary definitions*

Let us now touch on the difference between *too* and *also*.

(10) a. You'll have to get a passport, and you'll *also* need a visa.
     b. No, I won't stay for a drink—I'm driving. *Also,* I have to get up early tomorrow.
     c. "I like that green dress." "This one's nice, *too*".

LDELC defines *also* in (10a) as "as well; besides; too".
Activator gives a definition of *also* in (10b) as "ways of adding something new to what you have just said". Too in (10c) is defined as "used after adding a fact or remark which is also true about someone or something) (adv. not at the beginning of a sentence or a clause)". These definitions seem to be inadequate to explain the difference between *too* and *also*.

3.2. A relevance–theoretic account

(i)   Parallel confirmation

(11) Violet: Oh, the coffee shop. No, I'm... I'm new here. I don't drink coffee.
     The girl: I'm new here *too*.–T. Racina, *Nine to Five,* p.76

Assumption:

(11') If x is new here, x does not know where the coffee shop is.

(ii) Backwards confirmation

    (12) Peter: That's a pretty house.
          Mary: It is, *TOO/*also!* (Capitals indicate heavy stress.)

(iii) Backwards contradiction

    (13) A: You can't really believe in both.
          B: You can *too/*also*. (Cf. *OEDS*)

(iv) Parallel denial

    (14) A: Tanaka is rich. He plays golf.
          B: I'm not rich. And I *also* play golf.–Cf.Blass (1990:139)

Assumption: If x plays golf, then x is rich.

(v) Parallel premises

    (15) Amanda has bought a tracksuit. *Also/*Too,* she had a salad for lunch.

Assumption: If Amanda has bought a tracksuit/If she had a salad for lunch, she wants to lose weight.

4. *Huh/Eh*

4.1. Previous analyses

    According to Norrick (in press) , "*hunh* is common only in the United States and parts of Canada; *eh* is counterpart of *hunh* in England, Australia and much of Canada." But a comparison between *huh* and *eh* below reveals that these two particles are hardly amenable to exact characterization in the dictionary definitions.

(i) Agreement

    (16) 'You been away, *huh*?'—'Yes,' I said.–*COBUILD*<1>
    (17) Let's have another drink, *eh*?–*LDOCE2*

(ii) Irony

    (18) Lina: It's a good tape recorder. It's a nice one, *huh*?
          Nancy: It's a beauty.
          Lina: Beauty. Yes. Top of the line. State of art.–Norrick<2>

(iii) Challenging: So..., *hunh*?

    (19) Jan: Are you serious?
           Mary: I'm serious.
           Jan: So you're going to work eight to noon, *hunh*?
           Mary: Monday, eight to eleven.–Norrick<3>

(iv) Opening topics

    (20) Bob: Great vegie dip, *hunh*?
           Brad: Yeah. Awesome.–Norrick<4>

(v) Repetition

    (21) 'Let's go.'—'*Huh*?'—'Let's go,' I repeated.–COBUILD<2>

    (22) 'I'm cold.' '*Eh*?' 'I said I'm cold.'–*LDOCE2*

(vi) Pressure someone for a reply

    (23) Lynn: Channel five and two are news. It's ten o'clock.
           Rob: Yeah. What do you want, two? Five? Seven? Thirteen?
           Seventeen? *Hunh*?
           Lynn: Five. Five. Always five.–Norrick<6>

(vii) Surprise

    (24) 'We'll go and ask Parsons.'—'*Huh*? What can he
           do?'–*COBUILD*<3>
    (25) *Eh*? What did you say?–*RHDS*

(viii) Not impressed by what someone has just said

    (26) 'I ran six miles today.' '*Huh*, I do twice that much every weekend.
           –*COBUILD*<4>

(ix) Doubt

    (27) from Canada, *eh*?–*New York Times Everyday Dictionary*

4.2. COBUILD CD–ROM:

COBUILD CD–ROM characterizes the relation between *huh* and *eh* as synonymous, but this seems to be rather inappropriate: "You say *Huh*, in

informal English, at the end of a question to indicate that you are asking someone to agree with you or to reply in a particular way: used especially in American English. Related words: SYNONYMY: *eh"*

"You say *Eh* when you are asking someone to reply to you or to agree with you".

4.3. DATA

Some differences between *huh* and *eh* will arise from the following observation.

(i)   Clause–initial *Huh/Eh*

    (28) Elsa: Here is the library.
            Indiana: *Huh*, this doesn't look like a library.
            Brody: It looks like a converted church.–*Indiana*, p.22

    (29) No example with clause–initial *Eh*

(ii) Clause–internal *huh/eh*

    (30) No example with clause–internal *huh/eh*

4.4. A relevance–theoretic analysis

According to Wilson and Sperber (1993:22), the dissociative particle *huh* encodes a procedural constraint on the higher–level explicatures:

    (31) Process X's opinion of Proposition with a dissociative attitude.
    (32) a. Peter's a genius, *huh!*
           b. Process X's (e.g. John's) opinion of Proposition (=Peter is a genius) with a dissociative attitude.

Huh in (32a) encodes the procedural meaning of (32b). All uses of *huh* can be related to this core procedural meaning. So in the definition of *huh*, we have to show how each use (e.g. agreement/irony etc.) can be cognitively derived from this core procedural meaning.

The question particle *eh* encodes a procedural constraint on the higher–level explicatures:

    (33) Process Proposition as a desirable thought from X's point of view.

(34) a. It's a lovely day, *eh?*
b. Process Proposition (= It's a lovely day) as a desirable thought from the speaker's point of view.

Eh in (34a) encodes the procedural meaning of (34b). Agreement/ repetition/surprise/doubt can be cognitively derived from this core meaning. More detailed research is necessary but we have just outlined the study of particles *huh and eh.*

5. Conclusion

In order to define the lexical items such as *but/except for/except, too/also* and *huh/eh,* we have to clarify their inferential constraints, that is, how these linguistic expressions affect the hearer's processing.

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