Lexical Ambiguity

Why is there Lexical Ambiguity?

- Quicky definition: Term X is ambiguous if it maps to two concepts, say C_A and C_B.
- Example: bank maps to C_{financial institution} and C_{sandbar}.

Isn’t this dysfunctional?
- Why not:
  - X maps to C_A
  - Y maps to C_B

Wouldn’t this be more functional?

Some Notions

- Lexical Ambiguity
  - Polysemy
    - Having or characterized by many meanings
    - Sometimes equated to Lexical Ambiguity
    - In lexicography: the minor meanings of a word
  - Homophony
    - The same pronunciation for words of different origins
    - Often used to refer to words that have wildly different meanings, however that came about.
    - In lexicography: the major meanings of the word

- Homophony
  - Similar sounding words.
  - Examples from English:
    1. aunt, ant
    2. two, to, too
    3. bat, baa
    4. lead, lead
  - 4 is actually a homograph, not a homophone
  - 3 is both a homograph and a homophone, in other words a homonym

- Polysemy
  - Polysemes are usually taken to be the same word, with subtle differences in meaning.
  - Which of the sense for bank in WordNet are polysemes, and which are homophones?
    - WordNet
Some Notions

• Synonymy
  – the semantic relation that holds between two words that can (in a given context) express the same meaning
  – Absolute synonymy is said by some to not exist
  – Terms that are near-synonyms, differing only in certain contexts, are called plesionyms (Hirst 1995)

Example plesionyms (from Hirst 1995):
1. lie
2. falsehood
3. untruth
4. fib
5. misrepresentation

The Paths to Homophony

• How do polysemes come about?
  – May evolve from metaphoric uses.
  – Take tiger. (WordNet)

The Paths to Homophony

• How do homophones come about?
  – Historical convergences:
    • [bæt]
      1. bat (as in mammal) from ME bakke for flying rodent,
      2. bat (as in baseball) from Celtic bata for stick
    • [næt]
      1. night – from Old High German
      2. knight – also from Old High German
  – Historical divergences
    – Metaphoric uses (polysemes) that gradually become different meanings
    – Borrowings and new words
      – gate

Selecting a vocabulary

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<th>Words</th>
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