

Quotes and phrases

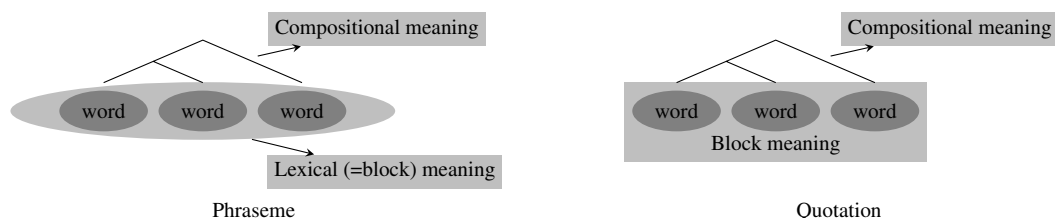
Rainer Ludwig

Starting point. This talk explores several consequences of the observation that (direct) quotations have a twofold meaning: One layer representing a “block” meaning that treats the quotation as an atomic, opaque unit, and a second “compositional” layer doing justice to the fact that the quotation prototypically is a (complex) linguistic expression of its own, and as such has an internal structure which obeys the same rules as the (“matrix”) sentence containing the quotation.

Similarity to phrasemes. Phrasemes, to use a rather broad definition, are frequently occurring expressions above word-level (*thank you, leave me alone, as far as I know, etc.*). A special case of phrasemes are idioms, which are usually assumed to constitute lexical entries of their own. Notwithstanding this atomic appearance, idioms are formed from other lexical entries (words, i. e.), by and large in accordance with the usual syntactic rules, and are thus accessible to a compositional interpretation. It is not only conceivable, but also plausible that not only idioms, but all phrasemes exceeding a certain occurrence frequency are stored in the lexicon as such. Idioms then are only the special case where the meaning associated with a phraseme departs significantly from the meaning that can be derived compositionally from the meanings of its parts. Quite obvious is the fact that in processing idioms and other sorts of phrasemes, not only the directly associated idiom meaning is accessible, but also the compositionally derived one. This points to the capability of a hearer to entertain multiple analyses of a given input in parallel.

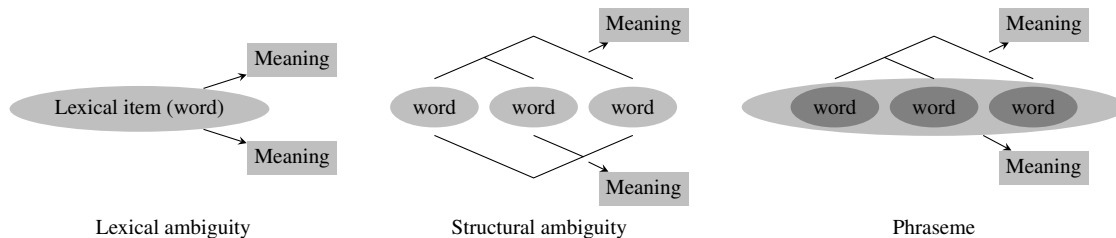
Differences between phrasemes and quotations. Quotations are both different from and similar to phrasemes. The similarity consists in that quotations are (for the most part) built from lexical entries following the normal syntactic rules, but are in many respects treated as an atomic block that can only interact with its surroundings as a whole. The difference is that quotations are not stored in the lexicon. (An interesting, not so rare case is when a phraseme is quoted — typically resulting in a type quotation rather than a token quotation reading as in *He rarely says ‘thank you’.*)

As argued above, phrasemes have a lexically stored meaning in addition to their compositionally derived meaning. For quotations, a similar observation applies; but of course the additionally existing meaning of a quotation cannot be stored in the lexicon individually, since quotations are not lexical entries. Rather, the meaning of a quotation “block” is the original utterance (type or token) itself.



Quotations, phrasemes, and ambiguity. The coexistence of block meaning and compositional meaning in phrasemes and quotations resembles cases of ambiguity at first sight. There is, however, the crucial difference that phrasemes as well as quotations have a primary meaning, which is the block meaning. E. g. as far as truth conditions for a sentence containing

a quotation (or, less universally, a phraseme) are concerned, it is always the block meaning that is taken into account. But it is still possible to exploit the secondary, compositionally derived meaning. In contrast, when dealing with genuine ambiguity, be it lexical or structural, there is a priori no reading with a primacy over the others.



Compositionality weakened. Under the view presented here, the principle of compositionality only holds in a restricted way for natural language: A compositionally derived meaning for a given expression may always be in competition with a meaning that is assigned on an independent, non-compositional basis.

Another kind of recursion. Quotations and phrasemes, as analyzed here, constitute a kind of recursion that is usually not considered when pointing out recursion as a hallmark of human language. This kind of recursion consists in a structure whose *atoms* are themselves structured *in the same way*. (This is not the same as simply saying that a structure reappears within itself.)

Technical implementation. In order to capture the simultaneous availability of the compositional and block readings formally, it must be possible to assign two (or more) distinct meanings to an object language expression, and to selectively access either of the two meanings from the cotext. This means that the way of interpretation (block vs. compositional) of a quotation is controlled by the respective cotext items that access its meaning. Technically, this can possibly be realized by enclosing the compositionally derived meaning in quotation symbols.

- (1)
 - a. John said 'I love Mary'.
 - b. $\lambda c_0 \lambda w_0 \text{say}'(w_0)(\ulcorner \lambda c_1 \lambda w_1 \text{love}'(w_1)(m)(\text{SPEAKER}(c_1)) \urcorner)(j)$
- (2)
 - a. John said he 'adores' Mary.
 - b. $\lambda c_0 \lambda w_0 \text{say}'(w_0)(\lambda w_1 \ulcorner \text{adore}' \urcorner (w_1)(m)(j))(j)$

Conclusion. The common general pattern that both quotations and phrasemes instantiate seems to be that of a recursive structure where the atoms may themselves have the same kind of structure, or, the other way around, a structure whose complex objects may serve as atoms in the same kind of structure. While there seemingly is no upper bound on how complex the objects that can serve as atoms may be, there do seem to be "smallest atoms" that are *not* structured internally — words, of course with the known definitional inexactness. It is now of interest to identify further areas and/or phenomena of language that shows this kind of recursive structure.