DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONCEPT AND MEANING

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Abstract: Meaning is formulated in order to draw conclusions and to solve technical problems. Tinkering around as long as it takes, until something halfway interesting comes out or can be concluded. Meaning is cognitive and communicative functions in the first place. Concepts, in contrast, are like continua relations and visions of possibilities. Linguists seems to be that area of intellectual activity, where the difference between concepts and definitions and consequently the difference between seeing something on the one hand and calculating it on the other hand, gapes apart most strongly and widely. In this article, we discuss this difference from several viewpoints.

Key words: concept, meaning, categories.

It certainly appears that there should be a relationship between concepts and meaning, but it is not entirely clear what this relation is. We shall assume that concepts are people's psychological representations of categories (e.g., apple, chair); whereas meanings are people's understandings of words and other linguistic expressions (e.g., "apple", "large chair") [1, 212]. Currently, many cognitive scientists, especially psychologists, believe that concepts and meanings are at least roughly equivalent, with the meaning of an expression being its conceptual representation in human knowledge.

In the just definition: As nouns the difference between concept and meaning is that concept is an understanding retained in the mind, from experience, reasoning and/or imagination; a generalization (generic, basic form), or abstraction (mental

impression), of a particular set of instances or occurrences (specific, though different, recorded manifestations of the concept) while meaning is the symbolic value of something.

Many theories assume that linguistic feature lists represent concepts (for reviews, see Barsalou, 1992b, 1993; Barsalou & Hale, 1993). A feature list contains linguistic descriptions of the characteristics associated with a category's members, such wings, feathers, beak, flies, and builds nests for bird. The simplest interpretation of these features is that they are linguistic expressions in memory. However, one then needs an account of what constitutes the meaning of the linguistic expression for a feature, simply pushing the problem down a level. The standard move for avoiding this problem is to interpret features as being abstract a modal propositions, represented in some 'language of thought,' such as propositional logic or predicate calculus. So, really, a feature list in memory is not a list of linguistic expressions for features, but is instead a list of descriptions in some form of conceptual representation.

Theories of knowledge often assume that concepts are context - independent and universal. Concepts are context-independent when they represent exemplars in isolation, omitting the typical situations in which they occur. For example, a context-independent concept for chair might only represent the physical parts of chairs, omitting the situations in which they are normally found, such as a library or living room. Concepts are universal when they attempt to cover all relevant exemplars simultaneously. For example, a universal concept for chair might attempt to provide a set of features that identifies every possible chair in the world and excludes all non-chairs.

In our framework, events are composed of situations, which in turn are composed of images. Note that event and situation in our terminology refer to cognitive representations, as does image, not to the physical world. Events, situations, and images parallel, at least somewhat, the constructs of scripts, scenes, and states in Schank and Abelson. Because we represent these constructs with images and perceptual symbols, whereas Schank and Abelson represent them with

propositions, our accounts differ considerably in many ways associated with these alternative forms of representation.

We define an image as:

(1) a set of perceptual symbols,

(2) representing individuals and/or models,

(3) in a static spatial configuration,

(4) perceived from a particular perspective [5, 100-101].

For example, an image might be a frontal view of flowers in a vase on a table against a wall in a room.

We define a situation as:

(1) a series of images,

(2) depicting a relatively constant set of individuals and/or models,

(3) changing in some significant way continuously over time,

(4) in a relatively constant region of space [6,175-176].

For example, a situation might contain a series of images in which a person puts a vase of flowers on a table. An initial image might depict a person next to a table holding a vase, followed by images of the person placing the vase on the table, stepping away from the table, leaving the vase on top. As this example illustrates, the individuals remain constant in a constant region of space, with their configuration changing to represent a significant event, which might be the changed location of the vase, or the presence of something new on the table. An important issue concerns the representation of continuous change over time in a situation. In principle, an infinite number of images are necessary to represent a situation continuously. We suspect, however, that people store only the most informative images within a situation, those receiving their greatest attention. As demonstrated by Newtson, people reliably perceive salient 'break points' in perceived event sequences, where these points can generally be construed as occurring after major qualitative changes in the configuration of individuals. Because the cognitive system may often be able to simulate the likely path between the images at two adjacent break points, it may only store images at break points when representing the situation, computing

intermediate points on line when necessary. For example, the images of a person next to a table holding a vase, placing the vase on the table, and then stepping away may capture the break points of this situation, because they represent qualitatively different configurations of individuals, and because the intermediate images can be simulated easily.

Finally, we define an event as:

(1) a series of two or more situations,

(2) related in a coherent manner,

(3) leading to a significant outcome [4,223-247].

For example, an event might contain several situations that culminate in a vase of flowers being placed on a table. A first situation might depict cutting flowers in a garden, a second walking from the garden to the kitchen, a third putting flowers in a vase, a fourth walking to the living room, and a fifth placing the vase on the table. As this example illustrates, the individuals change, at least somewhat, across situations, as do the regions [7, 595-611.].

Although concepts are typically not equivalent to meaning, they play three important roles in constructing it:

(1) Concepts establish reference,

(2) Concepts provide 'running commentary' about referents.

(3) Concepts establish domains of reference. Whereas concepts function as senses in (1) and (2), they serve as referents in (3).

Finally, weak association and restricted discrimination make universal meaning irrelevant to most normal conversation. Because reference is typically restricted to specific individuals within specific situations, weak association and restrictive discrimination are usually sufficient to establish reference--universal senses that determine universal extensions are unnecessary. Because most people never have to discriminate the universal extension of a word from its complement, they never acquire universal senses, nor can they provide them.

Again, we stress that this working paper represents a theory in the early stages of development. Our theory clearly requires considerably more empirical support, as

well as more precise articulation. However, the primary goal of this paper has been to outline our theory in its current form so that we can begin to examine its claims empirically and implement it computationally. Empirical and simulation projects currently underway will hopefully increase our understanding of these issues, producing a more refined and sophisticated theory in the process.

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