MA Requirements: Written Assignments

Written Assignment #3

Prescribed reading

Akmaijian et al., 2001 (LLC Chapter 6): pp. 227-274
Hofmann, 1993 (Realms of Meaning: An Introduction to Semantics, Chapter 1): pp. 1-19 [photocopy will be provided by Dr. Marshall]

Tasks

Task 1
(a) Before 1960, according to Akmajian et al. (2001: chapter 6), many linguists did not consider semantics to be a part of grammar. Explain the considerations put forward by Akmajian et al. for their claim that semantic information is indeed an integral part of grammar.

(b) Set out clearly what the goals of any semantic theory should be.

Task 2
(a) Different semantic theories are based on different definitions of the concept meaning. Explicate the specific conception of meaning that each of the following semantic theories assumes:

1. the Denotational theory of meaning
2. the Mentalist theory of meaning
3. the Sense theory of meaning
4. the Use theory of meaning

(b) Give a systematic account of the major weaknesses of each of the four theories in part (a).

Guidelines

1. The function of this assignment is to further your understanding of the relationship between what is said and what is meant in linguistic communication.

2. To complete Task 1, you must do the following in the order indicated:

   (a) explain what the term “semantics” refers to;
(b) specify in which respects semantics was considered, before 1960, to be different from the other components of grammar;

(c) set out the considerations that have been presented after 1960 in support of the claim that the grammar must include a semantic component;

(d) set out in general terms what the scope of any semantic theory should be;

(e) set out in specific terms what it is that a semantic theory aims to describe and explain.

3. To complete Task 2, you must:

(a) briefly characterize each of the four semantic theories, specifying in each case what particular concept of “meaning” it takes as its point of departure;

(b) set out the weaknesses of each theory by specifying which aspects of meaning it fails to address or fails to explain satisfactorily.

(c) You must clarify each central distinction in two ways: (1) you must clearly set out the content of the distinction and (2) you must illustrate the distinction with a concrete example. You should make it absolutely clear how each example illustrates what it is supposed to illustrate.

4. You should not repeat the information you gave in response to one (sub)task in answering the next.

5. Take care in your answers not to copy large chunks of text from the readings, or to simply paraphrase where an indication of your own insight is required.

6. Document your answer properly with specific references to your sources. Use Turabian or the Chicago Manual for your style (follow SBL Manual of Style for anything that falls outside the other two).

7. List in your bibliography only the sources to which you refer in your answers; do not list sources that you have studied but to which there are no specific references in your answer. For the entries in your bibliography, use the format specified above in 6. Note that the entries in a bibliography are not numbered.

8. Your answer must not exceed 1000 words (ca. 300 words for Task 1 and ca. 700 words for Task 2). This means that you must limit yourself to what is strictly relevant. Do not discuss points that are peripheral to the particular topic at hand.
9. Before submitting your answer, make sure that it meets the minimum requirements set out in the Assignment Checklist (found in the document “Requirements for Assignments” (part 4), Appendix D). [You may ignore the item about a “plagiarism declaration” and can assume that formatting issues are to be followed according to what is specified in 6 above.]

10. Your answer may be returned unmarked to your for revision if it is not clear that you have made a conscious effort to follow guidelines 1-9.