



Semantics: analysis or interpretation of word meaning? A linguistic approach to cup.

Christopher Golz

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Semantics: analysis or interpretation of word meaning? A linguistic approach to cup. Christopher Golz
Seminar paper from the year 2003 in the subject American Studies - Linguistics, grade: 1,3 (A), University of Freiburg (English Seminar), course: Proseminar Semantics, 24 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: Daher erfordert man auch, einen abgesonderten Begriff sinnlich zu machen, d.i. das ihm korrespondierende Objekt in der Anschauung darzulegen, weil, ohne dieses, der Begriff (wie man sagt) ohne Sinn, d.i. ohne Bedeutung bleiben würde.
(Kant 1998: 768)

Semantics tries to fulfill that demand and this paper is thought to present the ordinary research methods, exemplified on the word cup. The structure of the paper and some details especially in chapter 4 are similar although neither intended nor grounded on Wierzbicka (1985) who focuses on lexicographic aspects of cup trying to give a satisfying dictionary entry. I begin with a very brief etymology of this word. The OE word *cuppe* is generally taken from the Late Latin *cuppa*, which is a variant of Latin *cupa* meaning “a tub”. The origin is probably the Proto-Indo-European word **keupstanding* for “a hollow”. In the 18th century, the most common drinking vessel, a mug, was replaced due to the introduction of the cup for hot liquids like tea, coffee or chocolate and the glass, used for cold liquids.

The basis of this paper is once more Ferdinand de Saussure’s “Course in general linguistics” and his demand that “language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others [...]” (1960: 114). The consequence of this statement is mentioned later in his book: “Their [i.e. the linguistic signs] most precise characteristics is in being what the others are not” (ibid: 117). The meaning of one word can therefore only be derived by comparing the sense relations to other words in the system. This interdependence of meaning complicates a simple analysis. I will therefore start with a list of semantically related words to work with grounded on the synonym dictionary *The Synonym Finder*: cup (teacup, demitasse and cannikin), mug (tumbler, beaker, tankard and chalice), jug (can, stein and pitcher), goblet (pot), glass (beer glass, wine glass), drinking horn and bowl. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary describes a cup as “a small container shaped like a bowl, usu with a handle, used for drinking tea, coffee etc.” This paper deals with cup in that sense, used in present day English.

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