What is Semantics?

Semantics is the part of linguistics that studies meaning in language:

I. The meaning(s) of a word.
   (1) a. I can drive them to the party tomorrow.
       b. I can tuna for a living.
       c. Pass me a can of Coke, please.
   (2) a. He holds an important office.
       b. He holds a beer in his hand.
       c. He holds on to the seat belt.
       d. They hold an election.

II. How the meaning of a sentence is obtained from the meaning of the words.

Semantics and Pragmatics

Semantics is closely related to pragmatics.

- Semantics deals with literal meaning.
- Pragmatics deals with the use of language, what it means in context.

How can one define what a word’s meaning is?

Ideas:
- Dictionary Definitions
- Mental Images
- Reference

Group work (15 minutes):
- You are assigned to one of the three ideas.
- Reread the relevant passage in section 7.2 of the language files.
- Discuss in your group
  - what the particular idea consists of
  - what the advantages of the idea are
  - what the problems of the idea are
  - Think of some examples for idea, advantages, and problems.
- Think about how to present this idea clearly to class, including illustrating examples and write a couple of overheads for that purpose.
- Present the idea to class in 3-5 minutes.

The Meaning of Meaning

The words mean/meaning are used in different ways:

John means to write ‘intends’
A green light means go ‘indicates’
Health means everything ‘has importance’
His look was full of meaning ‘special import’
What does capitalist mean to you? subjective feeling about
What does ‘cornea’ mean?

The last kind of use is the kind of meaning studied in linguistic semantics.