A Quick Introduction to …THE LEXICON AND SEMANTICS!

<u>Lexicon</u> - Mental storehouse of information about words and morphemes. Refers to the fact that humans can understand and instantly access tens of thousands of words.

<u>Semantics</u> - the study of word- and sentence-level meaning.

Our lexicons are definitely not organized like a Webster's Dictionary. Instead of being alphabetically arranged, the human lexicon appears to be organized by meaning and sound regularities. There is also a much more complicated interplay between <u>top down</u> and <u>bottom-up</u> information than in a written dictionary.

What do we know about words? Most are <u>ambiguous</u>, having more than one meaning. Word meaning can be <u>concrete</u> or <u>abstract</u>. We can also make a division between content (or open-class) words and function (or closed-class) words. For example:

<u>Content</u>*: old, dog, run*   <u>Function</u>: *a, this, my, (verb) + -ing*

Word meaning can be described in terms of <u>semantic features</u>. For example,
"*bachelor*" [+ animate, + male, + human*]   (*but note "bachelor seal")

Other semantic properties:
Motion   *bring, fall, plod*   **Q:** What is the evidence for these properties?
Contact   *hit, kiss, touch*   **A:** "slips of the tongue" (or speech errors*)*
Creation   *build, imagine, make*
Sense   *see, hear, feel*

Ex.: *(intended) "bridge of the nose à (realized)"bridge of the neck"*
Note: this example also gives some evidence of phonological similarity, i.e., with [n]

Semantics concerns such notions as <u>denotation</u> (denoting the actual thing, or <u>referent</u>, in the world) and <u>connotation</u> (dealing with the "extra" <u>sense</u> in word meaning once the connotation is removed)
<u>Ex</u>: "lady", "woman" – same denotation, different connotations..

Semantics also concerns truth conditions of sentences and the buildup of meaning at the sentence and phrase levels.

Idioms and *metaphors* are cases in which semantics do not build up in a predictable way – the sum of the whole is different than the component parts..

e.g.,   IDIOM: *he kicked the bucket* (to die)
          METAPHOR: *my car is a real dog* (ugly)

Katz, Seminar in Aphasiology