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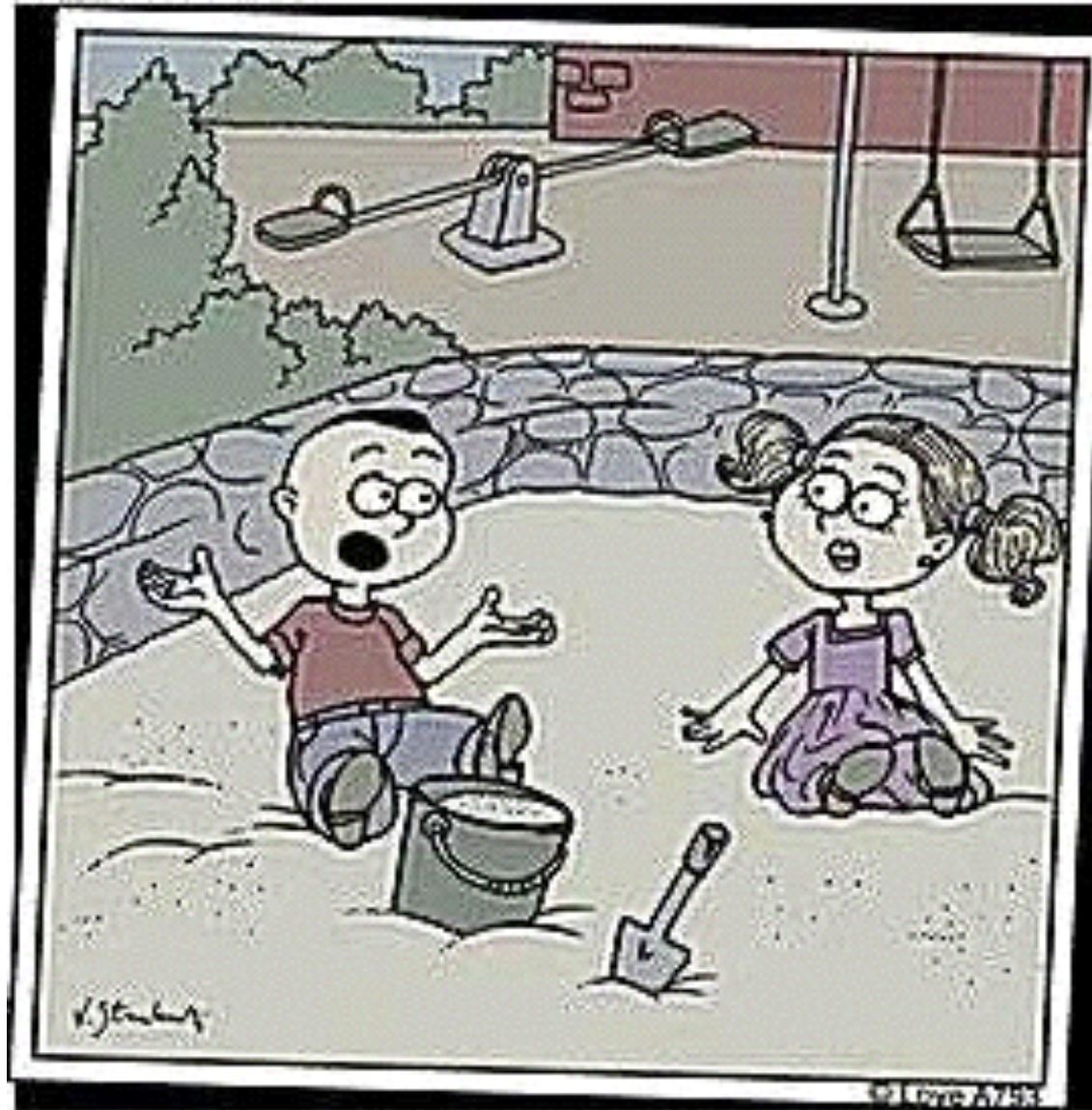
Antonymy in Language Structure and Use

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DER FORSCHUNG | DER LEHRE | DER BILDUNG

Oppositeness

Are you the opposite sex, or am I?

Contents

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2. The notion of oppositeness (antonymy)
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1. Introduction

Lexical meanings: Network of senses

- Synonymy

- Hyponymy

- Meronymy

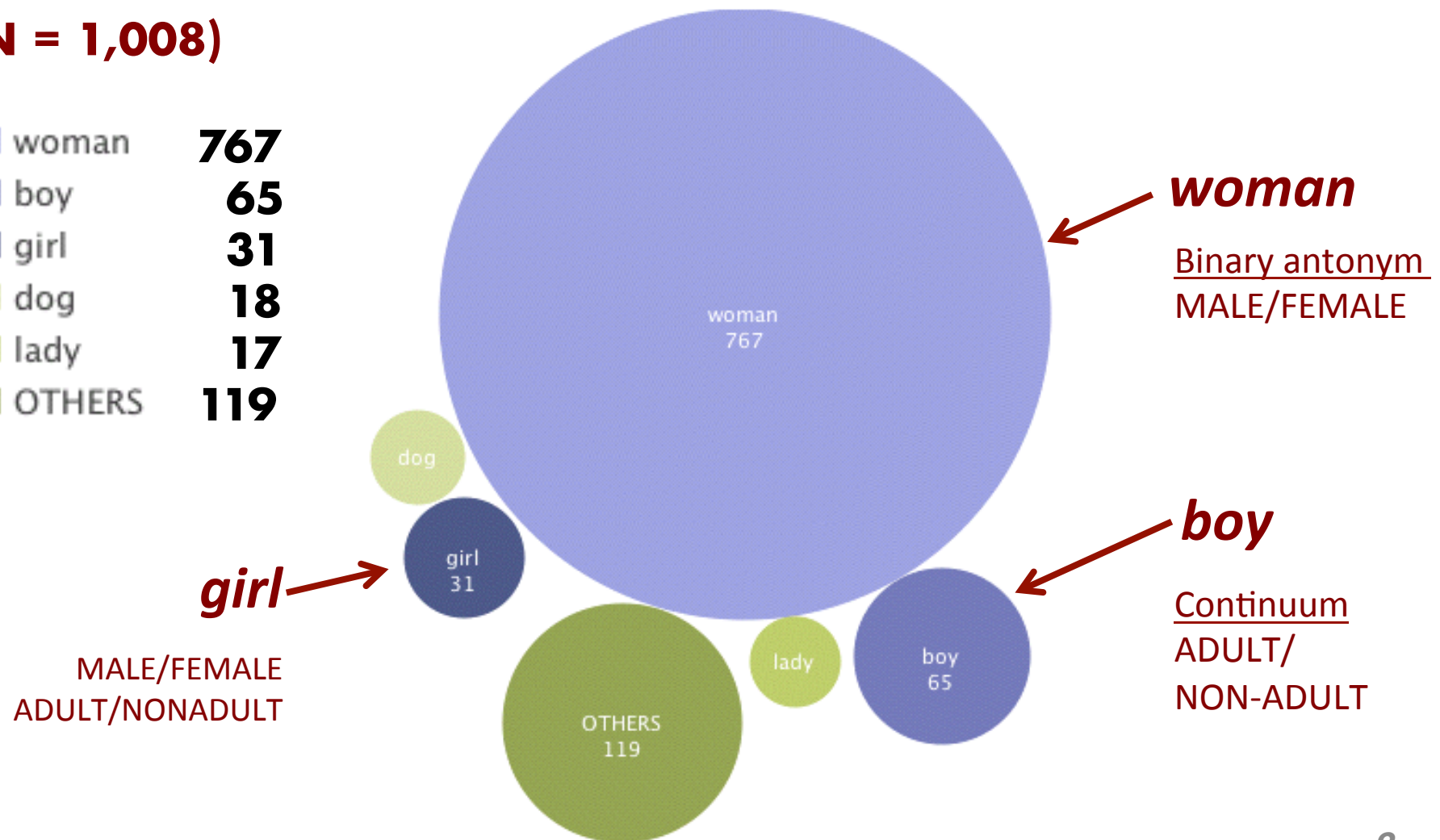- Antonymy

Table 1. Some examples for word associations
(adapted from Clark & Clark 1977)

Stimulus	Five most frequent word associations to stimulus words *man*, *boy*, *long*, *yellow* Number of subjects tested: 1,008					
man	**woman 767**	boy 65	girl 31	dog 18	lady 17	OTHERS 119
boy	**girl 768**	man 41	scout 37	dog 10	friend 8	OTHERS 144
long	**short 758**	fellow 11	narrow 10	John 9	time 9	OTHERS 211
yellow	**blue 156**	red 115	color 106	green 89	black 73	OTHERS 469

Graph 1: Stimulus = 'man'

(N = 1,008)

▢ woman	**767**	
▣ boy	**65**	
■ girl	**31**	
▢ dog	**18**	
▢ lady	**17**	
■ OTHERS	**119**	

woman

<u>Binary antonym</u>
MALE/FEMALE

boy

<u>Continuum</u>
ADULT/
NON-ADULT

girl

MALE/FEMALE
ADULT/NONADULT

Graph 2: Stimulus = 'long'

(N = 1,008)

■ short		758
■ fellow		11
■ narrow		10
■ John		9
■ time		9
■ OTHERS		211

short
758

short

Polar antonym
SCALAR

time

COLLOCATION

time

OTHERS
211

fellow

nar...

John

fellow

COLLOCATION
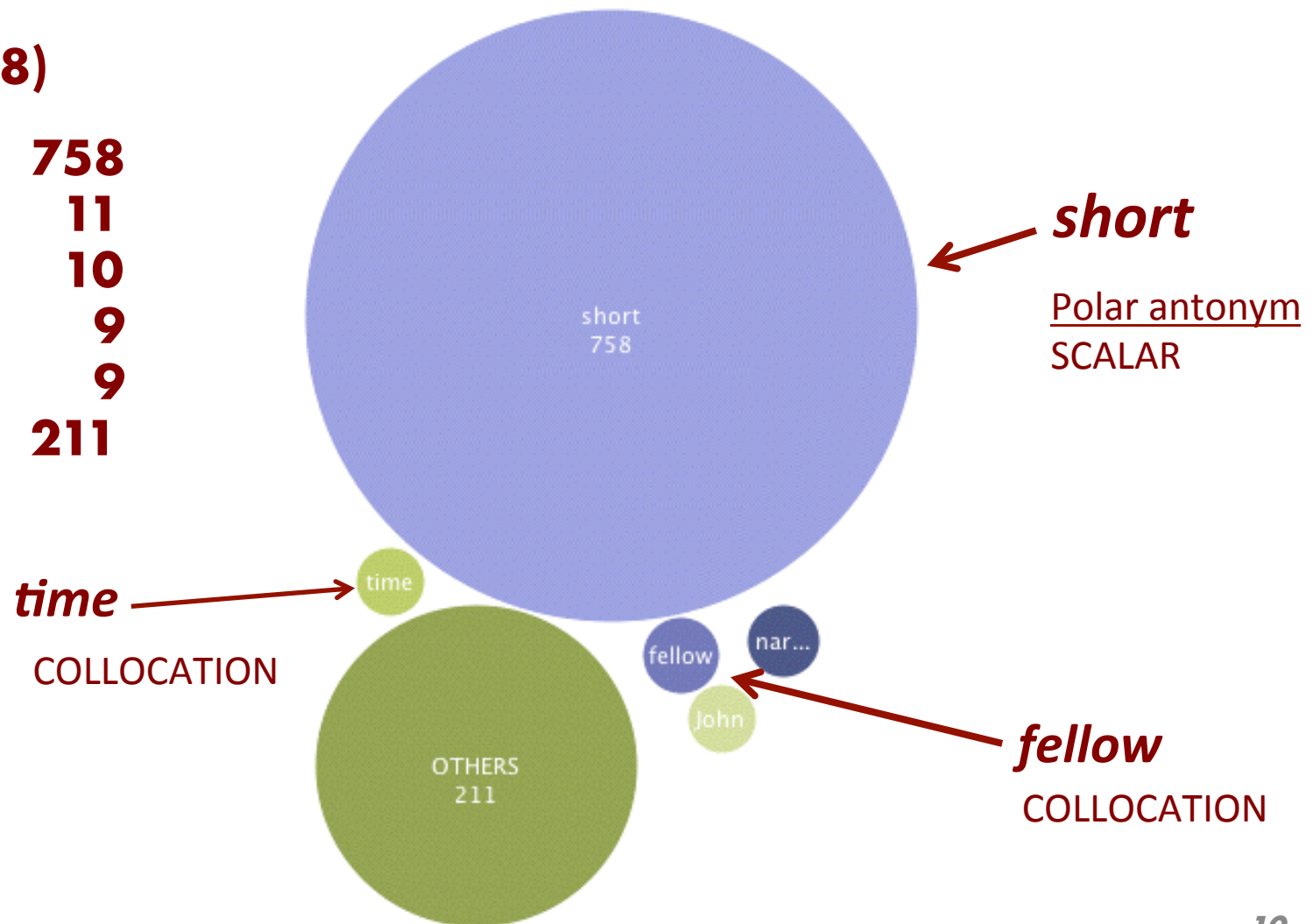
Antonymy in language structure and use

AXIS	LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON	
	Lexicogrammar	**Conceptual-pragmatic function**
Paradigmatic	Auto-antonymy in the lexicon	Irony, sarcasm
Syntagmatic	Antonymous words in constructions	Oxymora
	Clashes between lexical meaning and construction meaning ("grammatical oxymora")	Performative paradoxes

2. The notion of oppositeness (antonymy)

Antonymy: Narrow sense I

1. binary opposites / contradictories

   same – different
   single – married
   dead – alive

   They are neither both true nor both false of a thing.

Antonymy: Narrow sense II

1. binary opposites / contradictories

   same – different, single – married, dead – alive

   They are neither both true nor both false of a thing.

2. polar opposites / contraries

   young – old, good – bad, wide – narrow

   They cannot both be true of the same thing,

   but they may both be false of the same thing.

Antonymy: Broad sense

1. binary opposites / contradictories

    same – different, single – married, dead – alive

2. polar opposites / contraries

    young – old, good – bad, wide – narrow

3. multiple incompatibilities

    spring – summer – fall – winter

4. converse opposites

    buy – sell, parent – child

5. reverse opposites

    push – pull

Working definition of antonymy

Two lexical items are antonyms if

- they correspond to one of the types of antonymy already mentioned, and

- they are formally substitutable for each other in a construction (sometimes with minor adjustments) without resulting in ungrammaticality.
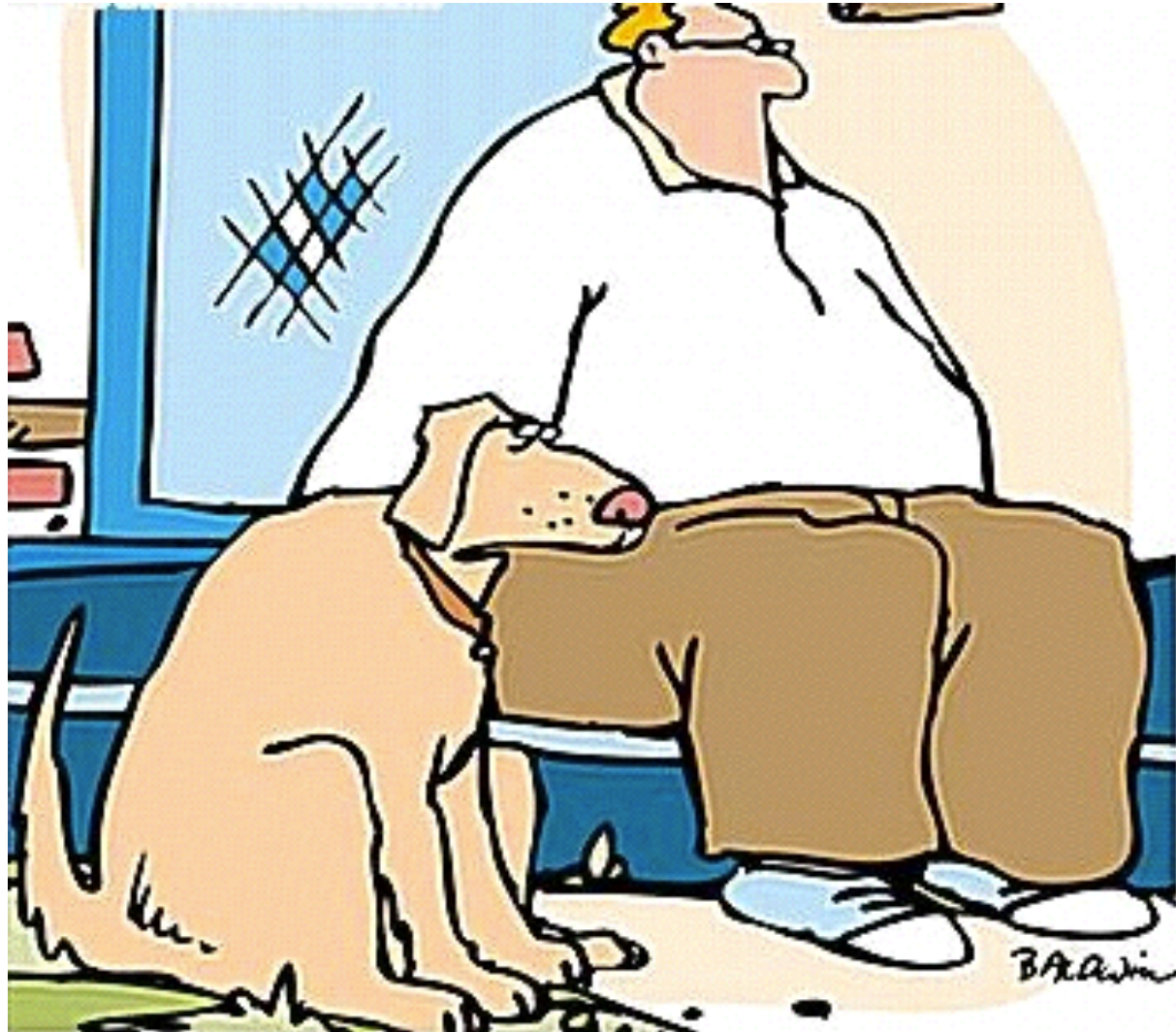
3. Antonymy on the paradigmatic axis

3.1. Auto-antonymy in the lexicon

(deleted for the lecture)

3.2. Antonymy for rhetorical purposes

Dog to master:

"How ironic. Since you had me neutered, you're my best friend."

Rhetorical effects

Irony, sarcasm

- Boy, this food is *terrific*! (Akmajian et al. 2001: 378; italics mine)

- That argument is a real *winner*. (Akmajian et al. 2001: 378; italics mine)

- You are a *fine* friend. → 'You are a bad friend'

Register and sub-culture

- *bad* 'good'
- *wicked* 'excellent'
- *pretty*, e.g. *pretty ear* 'deformed ear, cauliflower ear'
- Voßhagen (1999) investigates such uses and proposes treating them as metonymies.

4. Antonymy on the syntagmatic axis

4.1. Antonymous lexemes in constructions

Antonyms in some constructions (see e.g. Jones 2002, 2006; Jones et al. 2008; Murphy 2006; Murphy et al. 2008).

1. X and Y, e.g. *rich and poor*
2. both X and Y, e.g. *both Republicans and Democrats*
3. X and Y alike, e.g. *young and old alike*
4. whether X or Y, e.g. *whether single or married*
5. X as well as Y, e.g. *buyers as well as sellers*
6. X but not Y, e.g. *men but not women*

COCA data
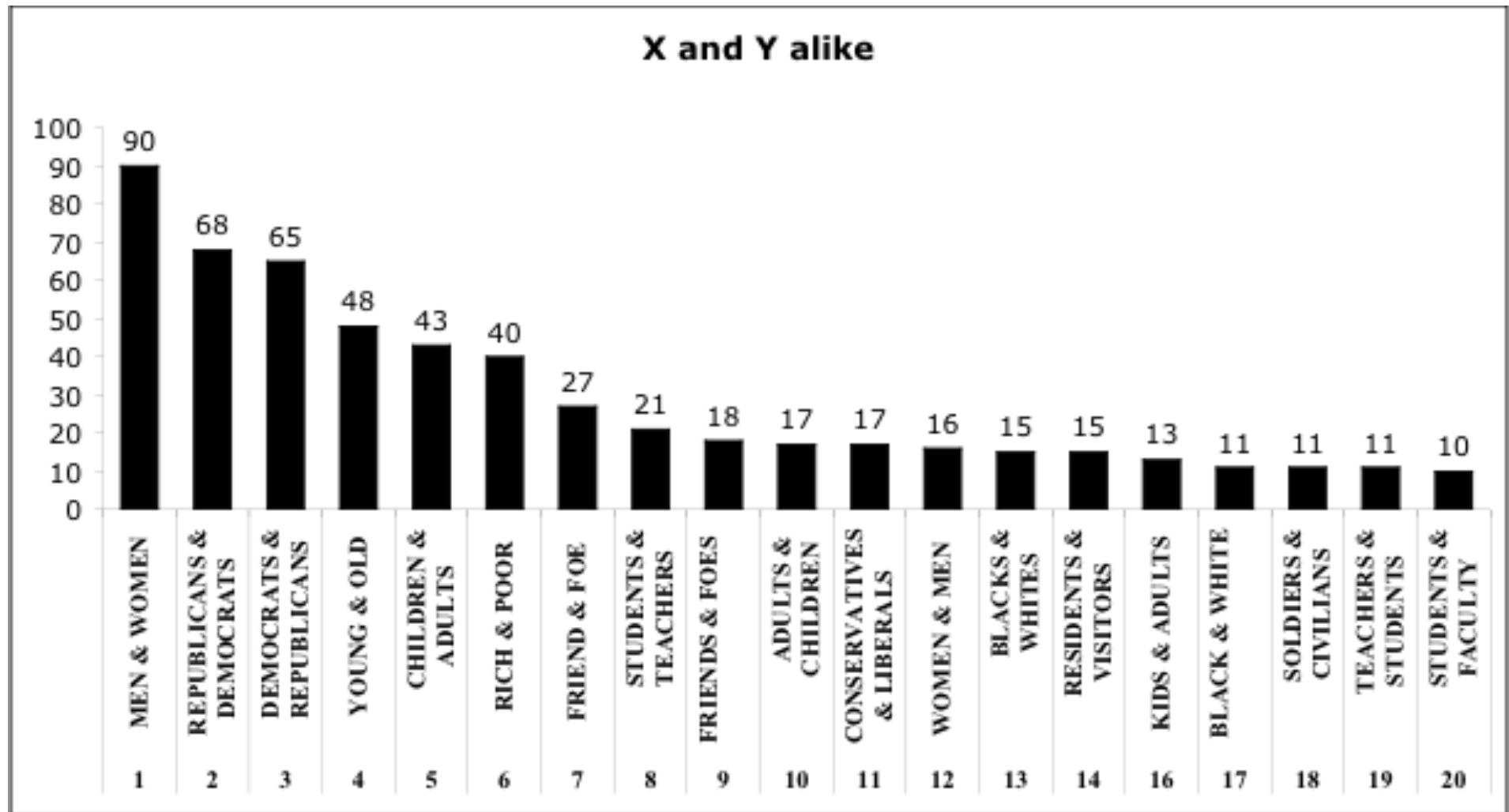
X and Y alike

The **X and Y alike** *construction*: Favors lexical items in antonymic contrast

1. ?**sparrows and birds alike**
    (hyponym – hypernym)

2. ?**birds and sparrows alike**
    (hypernym – hyponym)

3. ?**noses and faces alike** (meronymy)

4. *****buyers and purchasers alike** (synonymy)

5. *****boys and boys alike** (repetition)

Quantifiers 1

1. *all and none alike

2. *some and none alike

3. *everybody and nobody alike

4. *few and many alike

Quantifiers 2

However, quantifiers work if they are *not used* but *mentioned*:

'Some' and 'none' alike are quantifiers.

The *X and Y alike* construction: Meaning

- X, Y: antonymic
- Construction neutralizes conceptual contrast
- Construction conveys: some **predicate** applies equally to X and Y

  (see also Murphy 2006)

rich   *poor*

Why are opposite quantifiers <u>not possible</u> in the *X and Y alike* construction?

Quantifiers do not work in the ***X and Y alike*** construction because it is conceptually impossible to *neutralize* the contrast between e.g. *all* vs. *none* or *few* vs. *many*.

Murphy's generalization

- Murphy (2006: 69) formulates an important generalization about conjoined antonyms:

- "[C]oordinated antonyms are used in order to indicate that what is being said is true of both the opposite states and all states in between."

4.2. Conceptual properties of coordinated *binary* opposites

Binary antonyms: *X and Y alike*

1. The *dead and alive alike* of Brady's Antietam battle pictures visit us as ghosts, whose haunting images are still crisply preserved for our eyes upon these fine reproduction prints.

Binary antonyms: *X and Y alike*

1. The ***dead and alive alike*** of Brady's Antietam battle pictures visit us as ghosts, whose haunting images are still crisply preserved for our eyes upon these fine reproduction prints.

Straightforward interpretation:

Something is predicated of **dead and alive participants** in the battle photographs, namely that "they visit us as ghosts…"

No additional pragmatic inferences!

4.2. The inferential properties of coordinated *polar* opposites

Polar antonyms: *X and Y alike*

2. There was something for all, **young and old alike**.

Polar antonyms: *X and Y alike*

2. There was something for all, ***young and old alike***.

Pragmatic inference:

young and old alike ⟹ 'young, teen-aged, middle-aged, elderly, old'

Cf. Jones (2002); Murphy (2006: 6): "[C]oordinated antonyms are used in order to indicate that what is being said is true of both the opposite states and all states in between."

Figure 3. Pragmatic inference from polar antonyms to all values on the scale

Polar antonymy (e.g. *young – old, rich – poor*)

SOURCE

Pragmatic inference:

ANT+ & ANT- *ALIKE* $\Rightarrow$
ANT+ & SV_1 ... SV_n & ANT- *ALIKE*

TARGET
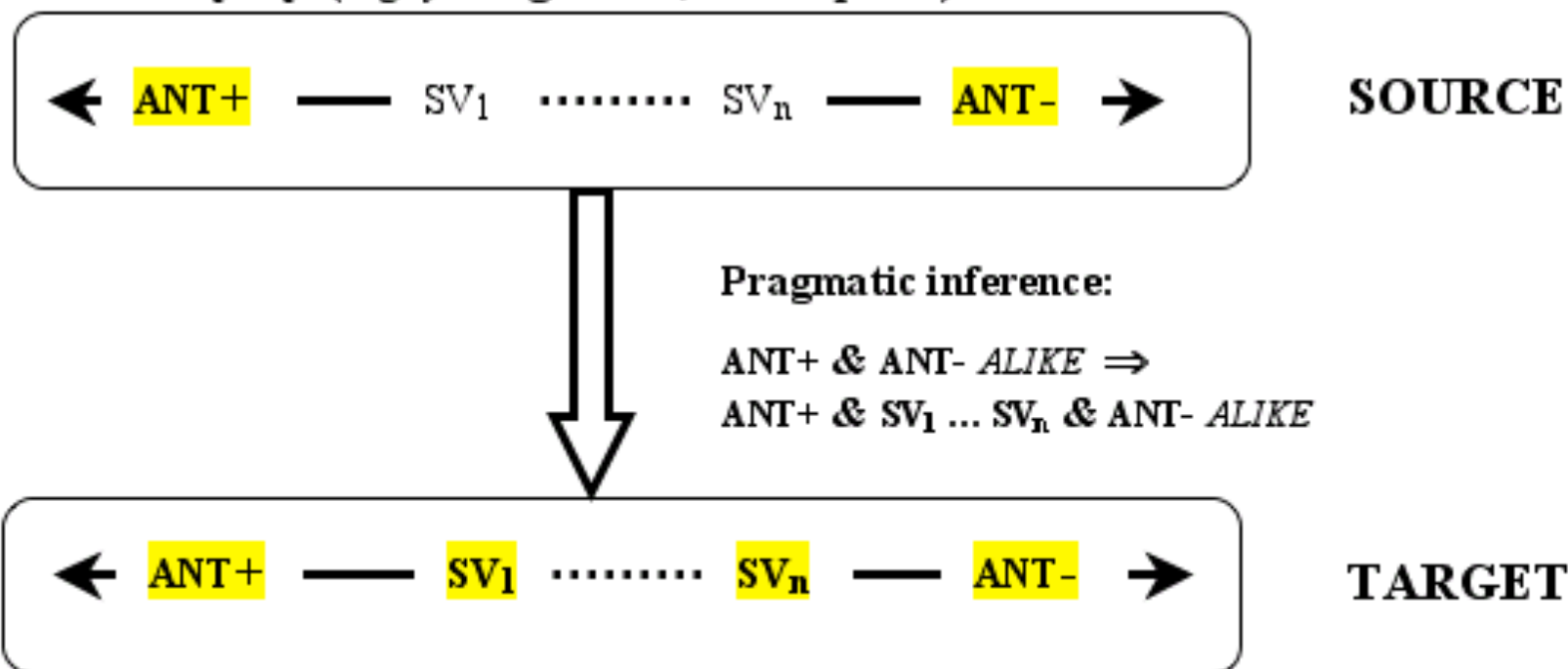
↔	antonymic scale
ANT	antonymic poles
SV	scalar values between antonymic poles
⇨	pragmatic inference (metonymic)

Pragmatic inference from polar antonyms to all values on the scale

- Metonymic: SUBCATEGORY FOR CATEGORY
- $\langle$ant+, ant-$\rangle \Rightarrow \langle$ant**+**, sv$_1$, ..., sv$_n$, ant-$\rangle$
- *Principle of Informativeness:* 'Say no more than you must' (Levinson 2000, Huang 2007): economical coding!
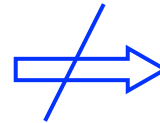- *Cancelable*

Non-polar scalar values

3. Building on foundations laid in the late 1970s [...] a large number of authors, *young and middle-aged alike*, in the past decade have produced an outpouring of research within the Keynesian tradition [...].

    [http://www.jstor.org/pss/2727103]

Non-polar scalar values

Pragmatic inference to whole scale
is not drawn:

young and middle-aged alike ⇏

'young, middle-aged, elderly, old'

4.4. Inferential properties of
multiple incompatibles

Multiple Incompatibilities: *X and Y alike*

4. A car-free family resort offering a warm welcome,
   summer and winter alike.

Multiple Incompatibilities: *X and Y alike*

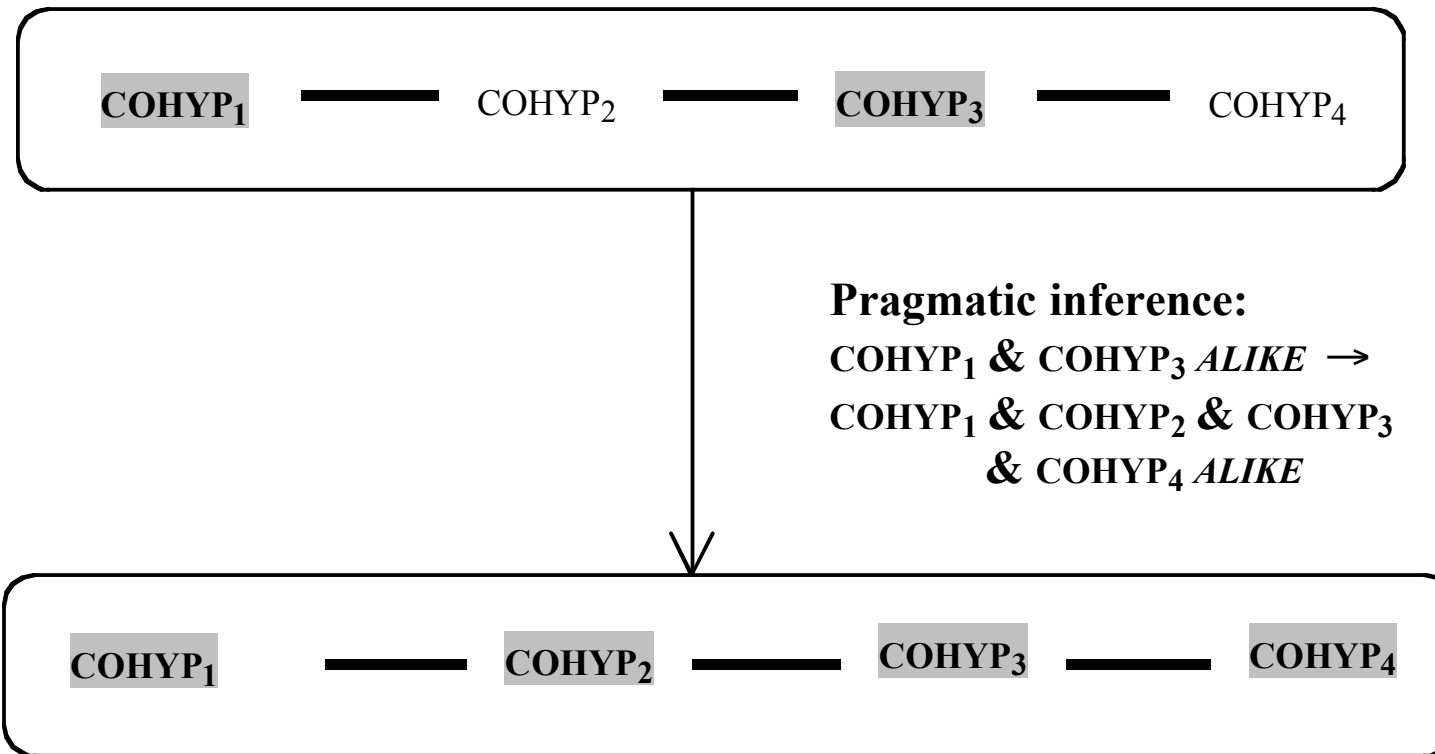4. A car-free family resort offering a warm welcome, *summer and winter alike*.

Pragmatic inference:

summer and winter alike ⟹

'summer, winter, fall, spring'

Pragmatic inference from two cohyponyms to all cohyponyms

Multiple incompatibles (e.g. *four seasons*)

$COHYP_1$ —— $COHYP_2$ —— $COHYP_3$ —— $COHYP_4$

Pragmatic inference:
$COHYP_1$ **&** $COHYP_3$ *ALIKE* →
$COHYP_1$ **&** $COHYP_2$ **&** $COHYP_3$
    & $COHYP_4$ *ALIKE*

$COHYP_1$ —— $COHYP_2$ —— $COHYP_3$ —— $COHYP_4$

——   cohyponymic relation

COHYP   cohyponyms

→   pragmatic inference (possibly metonymic)

Pragmatic inference from two co-hyponyms to all cohyponyms

- Metonymic: SUBCATEGORY FOR CATEGORY
- $\langle COHYP_1, COHYP_n \rangle \Rightarrow \langle COHYP_1, COHYP_2, ..., COHYP_n \rangle$
- *Principle of Informativeness*: 'Say no more than you must'
- *Cancelable*

Cohyponyms: inferential potential varies

summer and winter alike ⟹

'summer, winter, fall, spring'

fall and spring alike ⇏

'summer, winter, fall, spring'

summer and winter alike

Cohyponyms: inferential potential varies

summer and winter alike ⟹

'summer, winter, fall, spring'

- Summer and winter maximally ***contrast*** (in comparison to the other seasons), both ***visually*** and in terms of ***temperature.***

- Therefore, they can easily be conceptualized as **opposite** endpoints on a scale.

4.5. Contrasts in *prototypicality*

Bird watching

Contrasts in prototypicality

But I'm reasonabl[y] proud of it, because my point is that the fun in watching birds and their behaviour – ***sparrows and shoebills alike*** – is to discover new things and enjoy nature, rather than the ticking sportive competition.

Pragmatic inference to an open list, i.e. from prototypical members (*sparrows*) to more peripheral members (*shoebills*)

Inference from prototypical and peripheral member to all members

<PROTOTYPICAL CLASS MEMBER &

PERIPHERAL CLASS MEMBER>

→

<ALL CLASS MEMBERS>

Pragmatically construed antonymy

I aspire to a future that still included strong cohorts of British academics — returning ***Argonauts and homebodies alike***!

[The Distant Fen: Cambridge in the World. Annual Address to the Regent House, 1 October 2007]

Greek mythology: The Argonauts were a group of heroes in search of the Golden Fleece.

Pragmatic inference from Argonauts and homebodies to all kinds of academics.
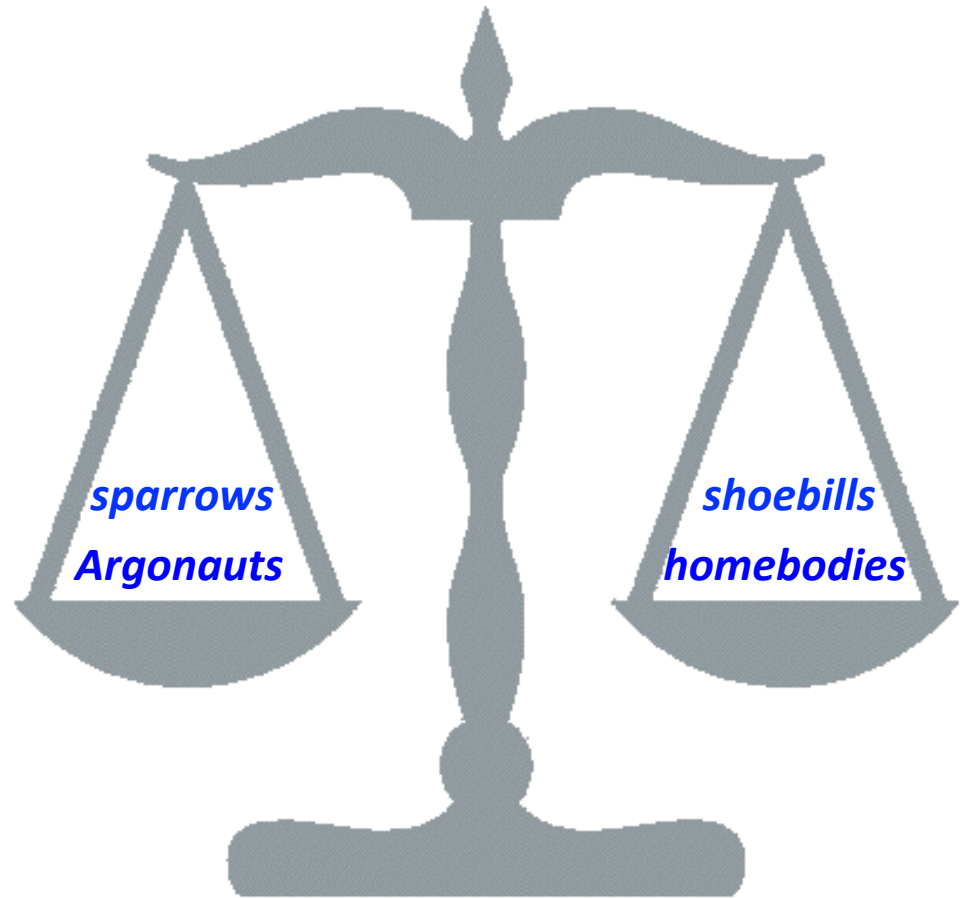
4.6. The meaning of the *X and Y alike* construction revisited

The *X and Y alike* construction: Meaning (initial proposal)

- X, Y: antonymic
- Construction neutralizes conceptual contrast
- Construction conveys: some **predicate** applies equally to X and Y

(see also Murphy 2006)

rich *poor*

The *X and Y alike* construction: Revised generalization

- *X, Y*: conceptually distinct / dissimilar

- *Construction*: neutralizes conceptual contrast

- *Function of construction*: to make *dissimilars* (entrenched or pragmatically construed) *similar* in at least one respect (coded in the predicate)


sparrows Argonauts

shoebills homebodies

Meaning and use of the
X and Y alike construction

- *X* and *Y* are conceptually construed as *dissimilar* within a conceptual dimension.

- *X and Y alike* neutralizes the conceptual contrast between *X* and *Y*.

- *X and Y alike* makes *dissimilars* (entrenched or pragmatically construed) *similar* in at least one respect (coded in the *predicate*).

Inferential potential of the
X and Y alike construction

- If *X* and *Y* are *maximally contrasted* (e.g. in terms of polarity, cohyponymy, prototypicality, etc.), an *exhaustive/open-list inference* is triggered from *X* and *Y* to class members, for which the predicate holds.

- If *X* and *Y* are *not maximally contrastive*, the exhaustive/open-list inference is blocked.

- If *X* and *Y* are genuine *binary antonyms*, the *X and Y alike* construction does not license an exhaustive / open-list inference.

Inferential structure of *X and Y alike* constructions
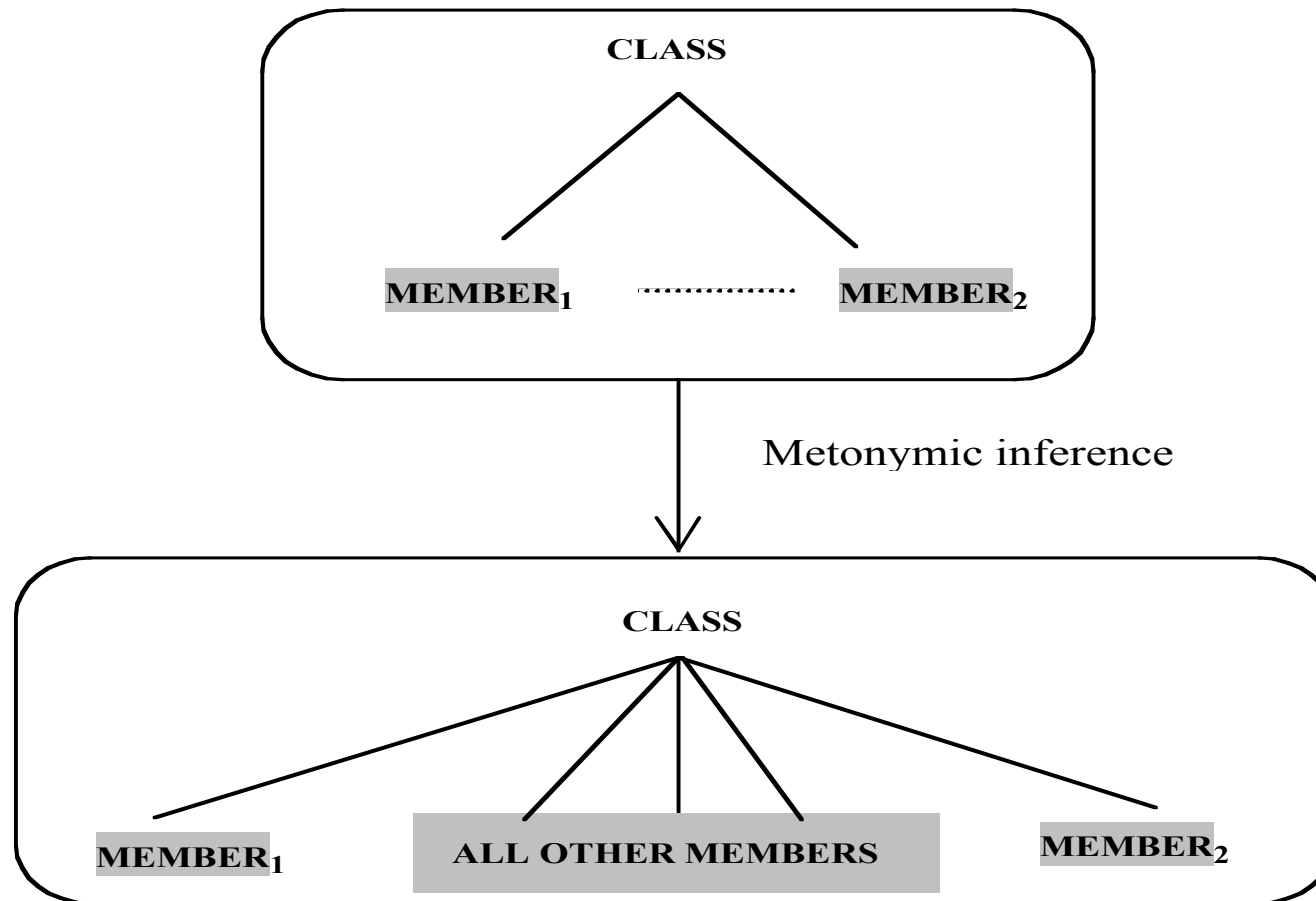
MEMBER₁ & MEMBER₂: maximally (non-binarily) contrasted members of a class
→ : metonymic inference (implicature)

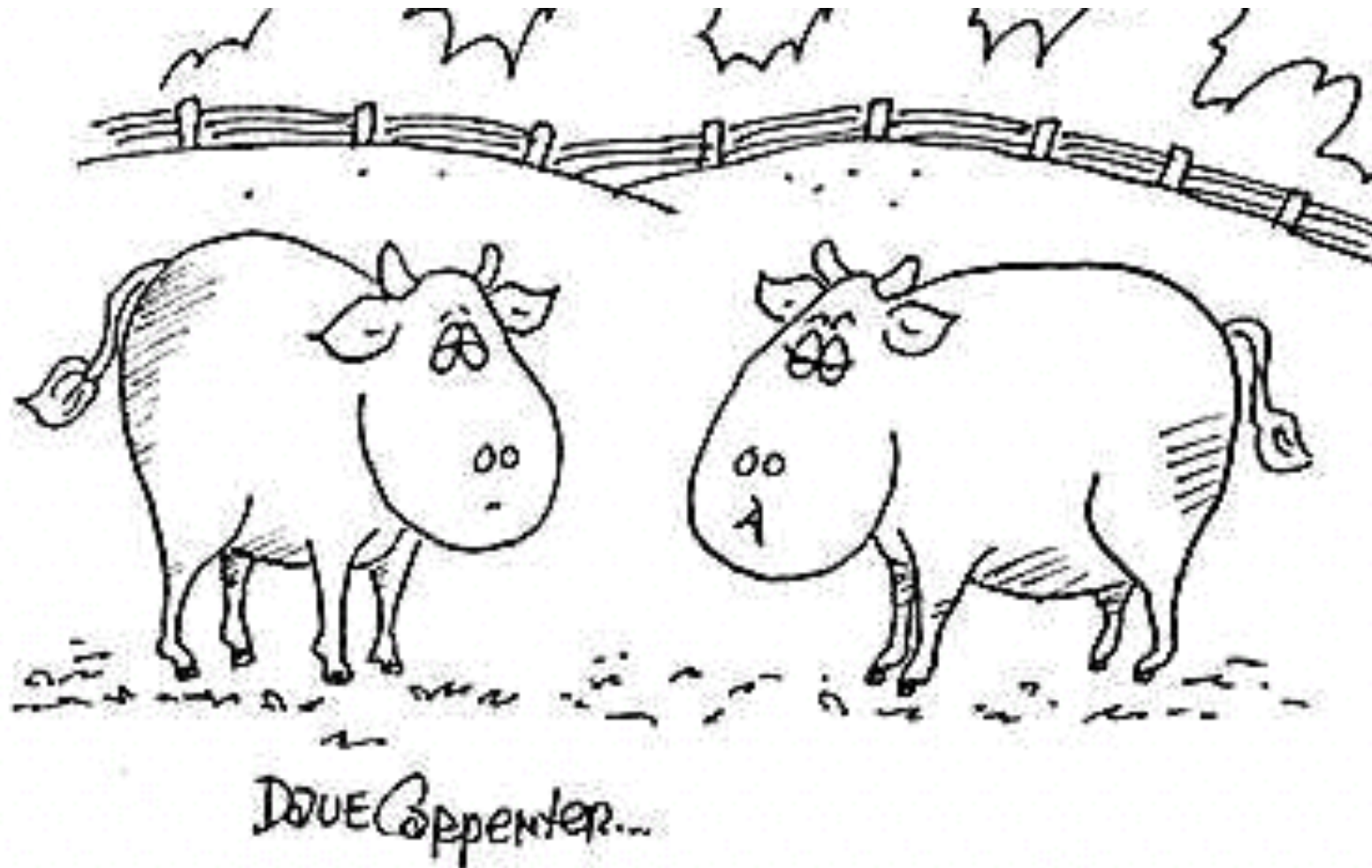# 5. Lexical and "grammatical" oxymora

5.1. Lexical oxymora

What's left?

Syntagmatic axis

Antonymic "clashes"

- oxymora

- lexical meaning vs. construction meaning

"Well I personally find the word 'oxymoron' to be an oxymoron."
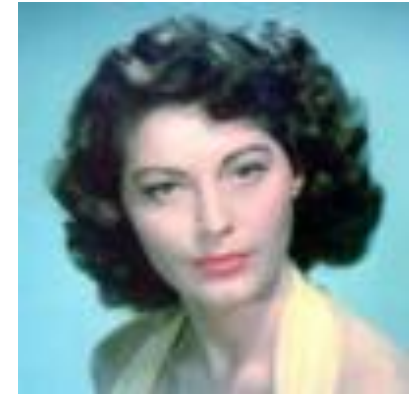
An oxymoron in Assamese

prithbikhan ghuraniā
EARTH-FLAT   ROUND

'the flat Earth is round' = an oxymoron!

[Borah, Gautam. 2012. Classifiers in Assamese: Their grammar and meaning chains. In Hyslop et al., Eds., *Northeast Indian Linguistics*, vol. 4, p. 305. Cambridge University Press.]
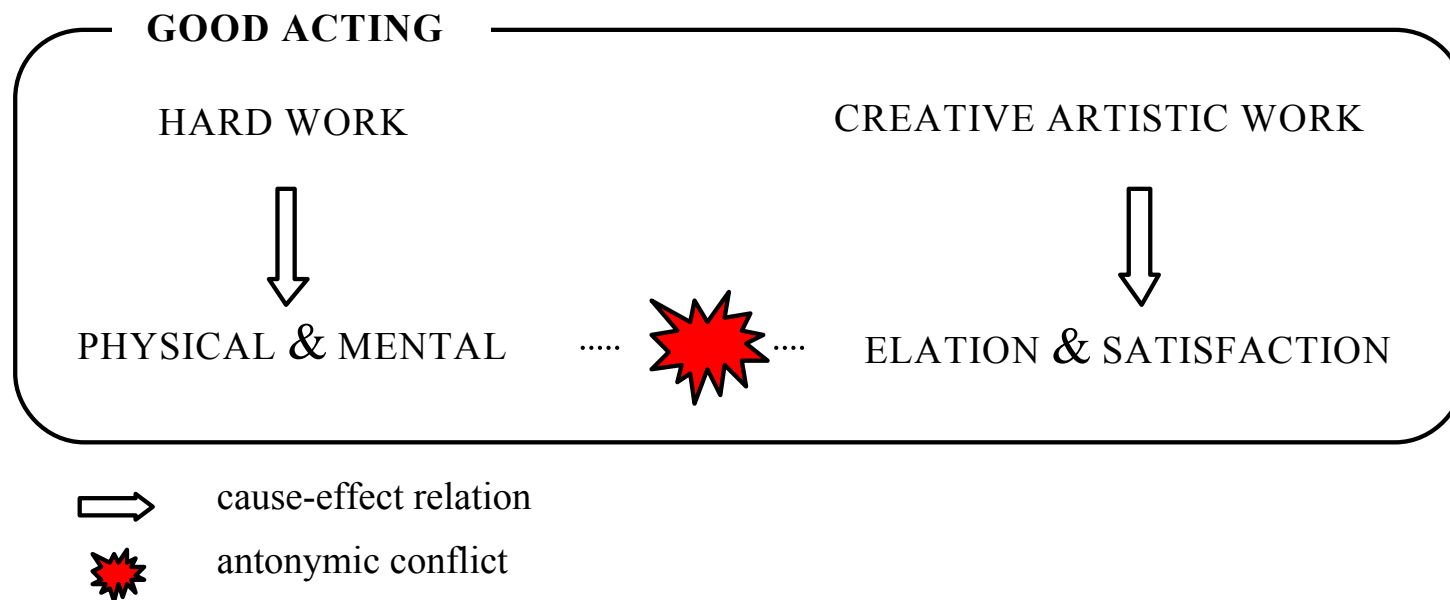
Oxymora

- N N: *love-hate* relationship

- Adj Adj: *bittersweet* love

- Adj N: *happy agony*

- NP is/will be NP: *freedom is slavery,*
  'Boys will be Girls' (TV show)

- the N of NP: *The Sound of Silence*

"*Acting is happy agony*" - Alec Guinness, actor

Oxymora

- stereotypes
- experiential basis

GOOD ACTING

HARD WORK		CREATIVE ARTISTIC WORK
⇩		⇩
PHYSICAL & MENTAL	·····✸·····	ELATION & SATISFACTION

⇨ cause-effect relation
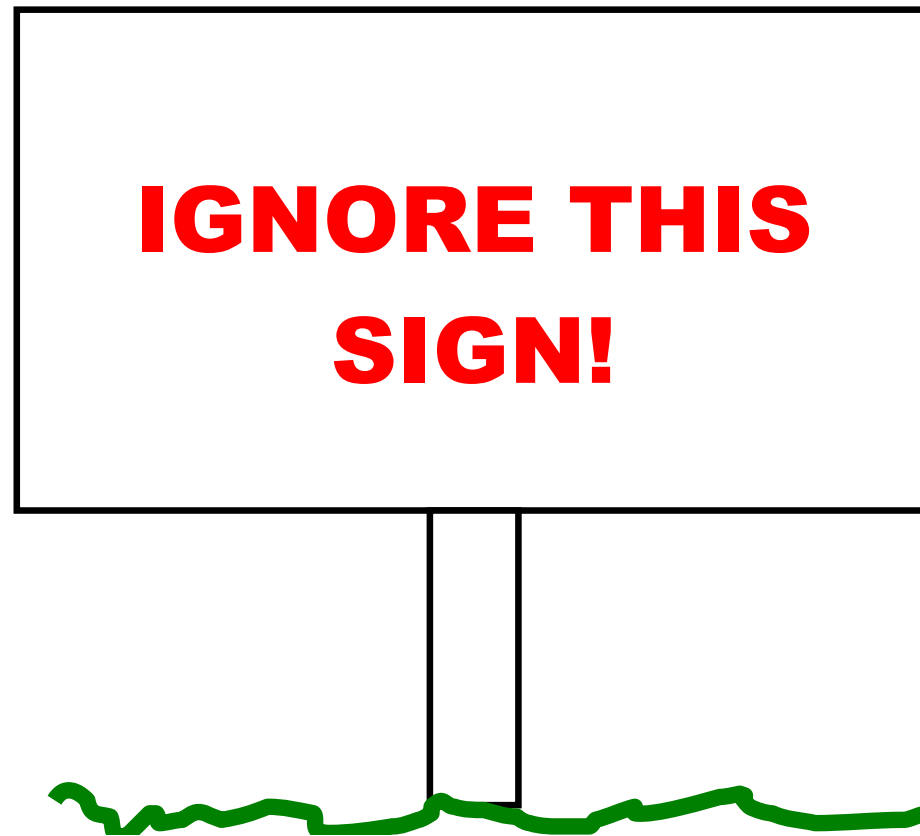
✸ antonymic conflict

Stereotype of the "suffering artist"

"You disgust me, but I like it."

5.2. Clashes between constructional and lexical meaning

Antonymic clash between word meaning and construction meaning

Oxymora: Antonymic clashes between words and constructions

1. *Ignore this sign!*

   An order that cannot be complied with.

2. *How to be spontaneous.*

3. *Be spontaneous at the right time ...*

   Interpretation of (2) and (3) as either **nonsensical** or **meaningful** depends on H's psychological folk theory (stereotype)
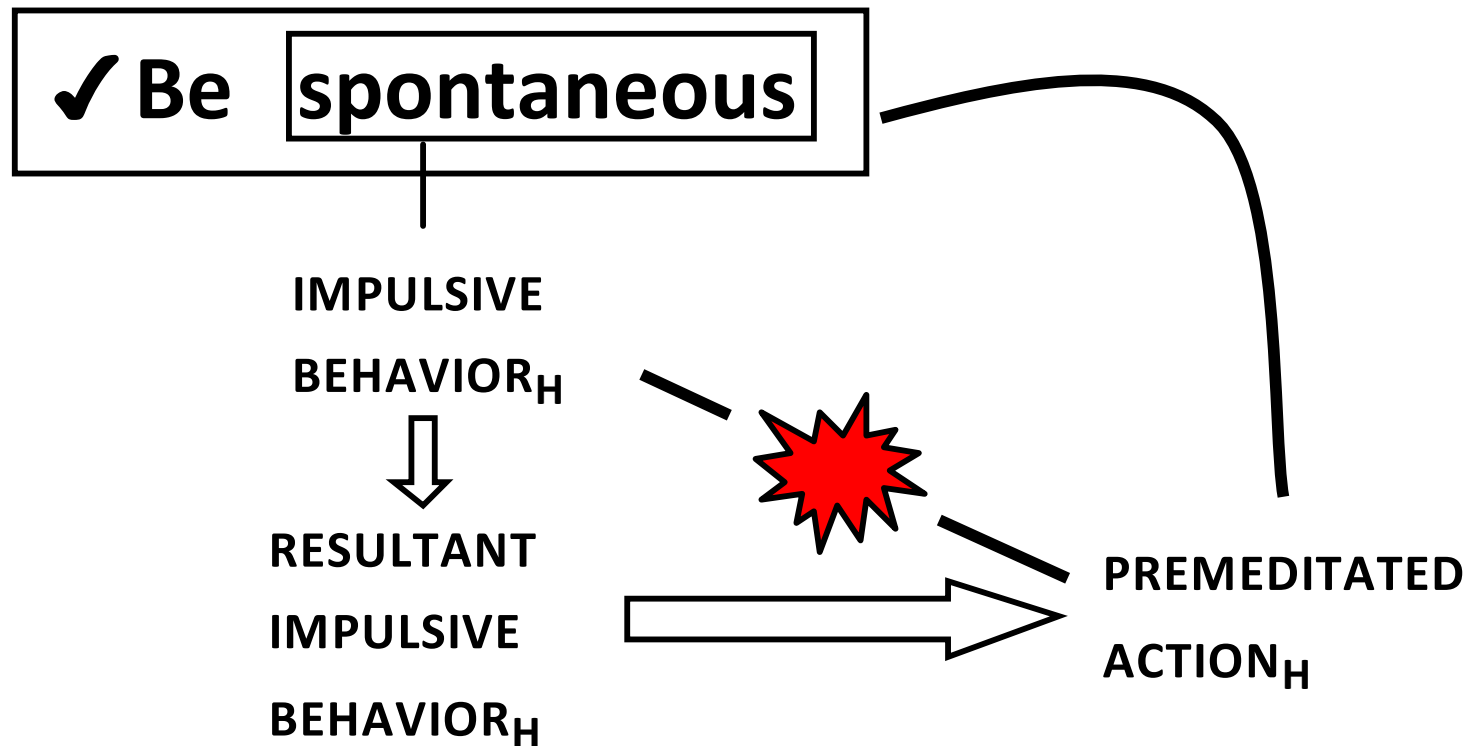
Antonymic clash: constructional vs. lexical meaning,
i.e. 'premeditated' vs. 'impulsive'

'S asks H to act in a spontaneous manner'

Antonymic clash: constructional vs. lexical meaning,
i.e. 'premeditated' vs. 'impulsive'

'S asks H to act in a spontaneous manner'

✓**Be** **spontaneous**

IMPULSIVE

BEHAVIOR$_H$

RESULTANT

IMPULSIVE

BEHAVIOR$_H$
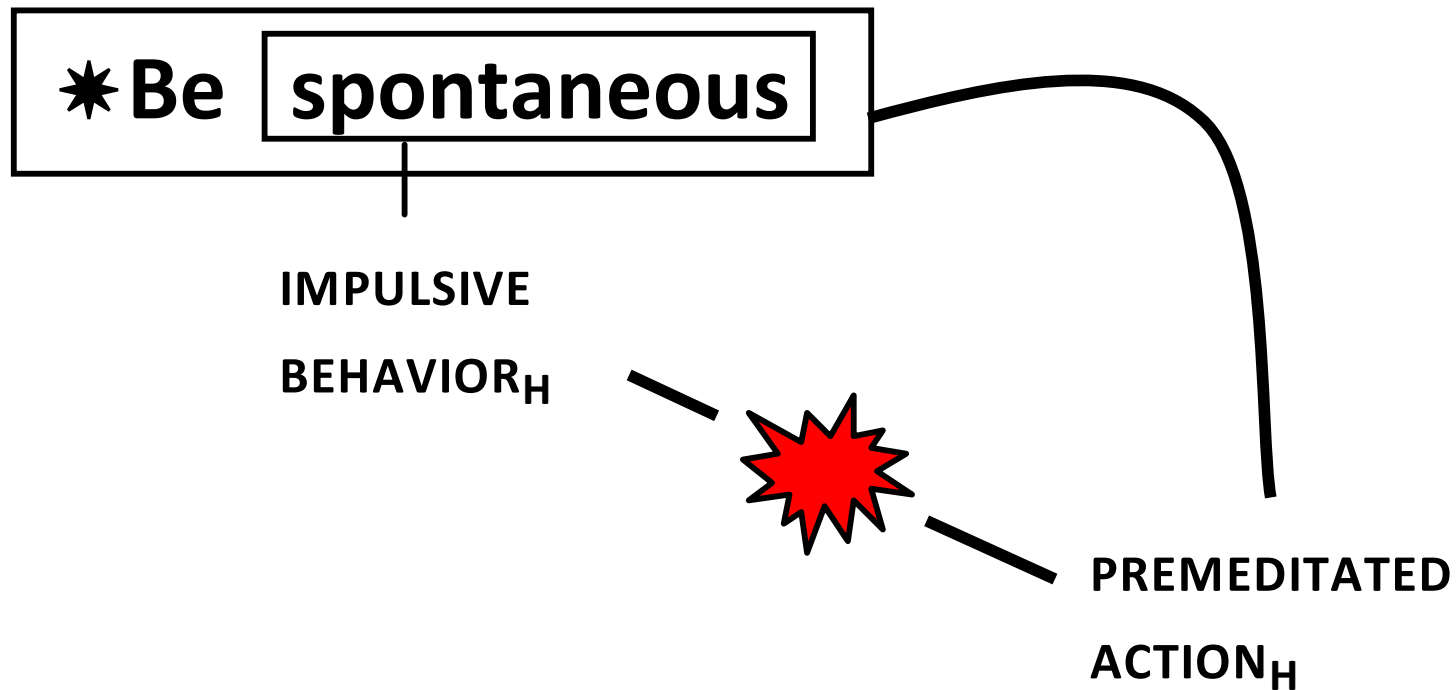
PREMEDITATED

ACTION$_H$

Conclusion

Antonymy

- is not just a static lexical relation;

- dynamically structures the lexicon, constructions, and speech acts;

- provides strong evidence again that cognitive linguistics should integrate a rich theory of pragmatic – including metonymic – reasoning.

References

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Murphy, Lynne M. 2006. Antonymy as lexical constructions: or, why *paradigmatic construction* is not an oxymoron. In *Constructions All Over: Case Studies and Theoretical Implications*. *Constructions* SV 1–8, ed. Doris Schönefeld. (available at: www.constructions-online.de).

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