

Semantics

Semantics is the choice of words and phrases, which put together, weave a pattern of meaning.

Terms to be learnt and applied when discussing semantics:

1. **The level of formality** – use of colloquial language, abstract, or Latin-based vocabulary etc.
2. **The field of reference** – terms that are from the same area of knowledge or experience (e.g. medicine, computers, love and war).
3. **Connotation** – the way in which some words and phrases can evoke powerful association or feelings in the reader's mind, and make him/her view the subject matter in a certain light.

Foreign terms are sometimes used to give particular impressions, playing on the stereotypes we have of different cultures (e.g. French "romance" to sell perfume, German "efficiency" to market cars).

4. **The use of idiomatic language** – language that works on more than the simply literal level (e.g. metaphor, pun). Idiomatic language can be put to a variety of uses, often it works towards constructing a particular viewpoint for the reader, sometimes by bringing different ideas together in a new way.
5. **Collocation** – the way in which certain items of language are expected to occur and in a certain order (e.g. fish and chips; he and she; Father, Son and Holy Ghost). Some collocations become clichés – rather worn out and empty phrases (e.g. blushing bride; rack and ruin; come rain or shine).
6. **Language change** – terms can die out, suggest a bygone age (be "archaic") be new coinages (neologisms), narrow or widen their meanings, or go up and down in respectability. Sensitivity to these changes is one of the ways we can date a text.