

## Analogy in Semantics

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The principle of compositionality may seem perfectly trivial. However, depending on what one means by “meaning”, one could argue that it imposes no substantive constraint or, to the contrary, that it cannot be obeyed at all. On the other hand, we could view this principle as a definition of “meaning” (or a component of such a definition), in which case it would yield a very abstract concept of “meaning”, one very far from empirically testable reality.

In my paper, I will propose a *holistic* approach instead of the traditional, analytic/atomistic one. Instead of insisting on cutting forms and meanings into pieces (or building them up from primitive and complex building blocks), I will emphasise the global features of signs. I will introduce the principle of generalized compositionality, which is based on the concept of similarities between forms and meanings. (The similarity of two forms or meanings is often related to their recognizable component parts, but the relationship is more complicated and indirect than the one inherent in the traditional concept of compositionality). My generalized compositionality principle states that we interpret and produce complex signs by analogy, relying on our earlier experience on similar complex signs and their interpretation.

This approach, I believe, has several attractive consequences. First, it predicts that interpretation will be subject to various frequency effects and other psychological factors (just like phonological or morphological phenomena in analogy-based models). This clearly means that we aim at a cognitively more realistic model, with a possibility of individual differences in interpretation and a clear-cut concept of where so-called “pragmatic” factors enter interpretation. Second, on this approach, the dubious distinction between “literal” and “non-literal” interpretations no longer make sense: the mechanism of “figurative” interpretation does not differ in any way from “literal” interpretation.