

UGRC 150

CRITICAL THINKING & PRACTICAL REASONING

Session 3 – DEFINITIONS (PART 2)

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Session Overview

- In this session we shall continue with the discussion of the **types of definition**. Specifically, only ***stipulative and real definitions*** will be handled. Then we shall look at what it is for a term to be ***well-defined*** or ***open textured***, and finally diagnose ***problems with definitions***.

- **Goals and Objectives**

At the end of the session, the student will

1. understand the different ways a real definition could be called and the importance of such a definition.
2. Be able to recognize when a definition is vague, circular, too narrow and too broad.
3. Explain why well-defined term is most preferred to open textured.

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Topic One: ***TYPES OF DEFINITION(CONTINUED)***
 - a. Stipulative definition*
 - b. Real definition*
- Topic Two : ***WELL-DEFINED TERM VERSUS OPEN TEXTURED WORD.***
- Topic Three ***PROBLEMS WITH DEFINITIONS***



Reading List

- Log onto the UG Sakai LMS course site:
<http://sakai.ug.edu.gh/xxxxxxx>
- Read Unit 2 of Recommended Text –pages 22-33
- Watch ***the Videos for session 3- Definitions (Part 2)***
- Visit the ***Chat Room*** and discuss the ***Forum question for session3 (Part 2)***



Topic One

TYPES OF DEFINITION (CONTINUED)



Stipulative Definition

- When the meaning of a word is **agreed** on for the purpose of *debate* or *a discussion* or *a project* then we say a **stipulative definition** has been established. Thus a **stipulative definition** is based on **deliberation and agreement** or through **consensus**.
- **Example:**
 1. Suppose if some one says: that *to love someone is to be willing to die for that person.*
 2. Take "human" *to mean any member of the species Homo sapiens.*
 3. For the **purposes of argumentation**, we will define a "*student*" *to be "a person under 18 enrolled in a local school."*

Real Definitions.

- A **real definition** is a definition that provides *the core meaning or the essential meaning of a word*. That is to say a definition of what a word appropriately stands for.
- Such a definition provides all the features and only those features that appropriately belong to a word.
- **Example:**
 1. **Even number** is any number that is divisible by two without a remainder.



Real definition continuation.

- **Real definition** is also called *well-defined definition*, *ideal definition*, and *eliminative definition*.
- When a term is well defined, it means that the *definition makes it completely clear all the things or objects in the world that are correctly called or picked out by the word*.



Real definition continuation.

- For any eliminative definition, the *definiendum could be eliminated and replaced by the definiens in every context where the word which is being defined is used*. This is because the definition provides the **necessary** and **sufficient conditions** for using the word correctly.
- **Illustration:**
- **Lets consider the definition of an even number as an eliminative definition.**
- *Even number is any whole number that is divisible by two without a remainder.*



Real definition continuation

- **Definiendum** – even number
- **Definiens** – any whole number divisible by two without a remainder.

Now lets consider the statement “**all multiples of two are even numbers**” for the illustration.

1. All multiples of two are **even numbers**.

Results are 2, 4, 6, 8, 10,.....

2. All multiples of two are **whole numbers divisible by two without any remainders**.

Results are 2, 4, 6, 8, 10.....



Real definition continuation

- *We can see from the above illustration that when the **defineindum** was replaced with the **definiens**, the same meaning was obtained from the statement. The truth of the statement “**all multiples of two are even numbers**” remains the same.*
- **This is what it means to say a definition is eliminative.**
- ***NB achieving the essential meaning of words enables us to avoid vagueness and ambiguity in the construction of the meanings of words.***



Topic Two

WELL-DEFINED TERM VERSUS OPEN TEXTURED WORD.



Well-Defined Term and Open Class Concepts

- A term or word is said to be a **well-defined term** if we can successfully achieve its *essential definition*. That is if we can provide a *definition that makes it completely clear devoid of vagueness and ambiguity which objects or individuals or properties are correctly called by that word.*
- Examples of terms whose definitions are well- defined are **terms from the field of mathematics and pure science.** Words like *even number, Set, Square, Triangle* etc are all well defined terms. **Their definitions are ideal or real or essential definitions.**



Topic two continuation.

- The definition of an **even number** says that for any number to be called an even number then that number must be divisible by two without a remainder. So with this definition one would be able to perform the necessary operation to determine which numbers are even and which are not.
- The same goes for **triangle, circle, a set, and all the other terms in mathematics.**
- **NB. WELL-DEFINED TERMS HAVE ONLY ONE MEANING.**



Topic two continuation.

- However, a term is said to be an **open class concept** when it is difficult for the *core meaning or the essential meaning* to be achieved. *Thus in an attempt to derive the essential meaning or real meaning we end up with many interpretations for such a word.*
- **Open class concept** are concepts that are open to several interpretations. *They are also called essentially contestable concepts or open textured words.*
- *Subject areas like Psychology and History and Economics contain many key terms that are open class concepts(that is, cannot be well defined).*



Topic two continuation.

- **Examples of open class concepts are;**
- *Family , justice, intelligence, equality, democratic process, life, love, wisdom, modernity, fidelity etc.*
THESE WORDS HAVE A LOT OF DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS BY DIFFERENT PEOPLE.



Topic Three

PROBLEMS WITH DEFINITIONS



Problems With Definitions

- In this final part of the session on **definitions**, we look at the problems that can be identified in the definitions we provide for words. ***The purpose is to warn ourselves against such problems and to avoid making them in our essays and projects as well as in our speeches.***
- **There are four problems arising with definitions;**
 1. Too narrow
 2. Too broad
 3. Vague
 4. Circular also called begging the question.



Too narrow

- A definition is **too narrow** when the *definiens does not cover all the things in the world that correctly belong in the denotation of the word*. In other words when the definition does not cover all the denotations of the word.
- **Examples:**
 - 1. Chair is wooden object for one person to sit on with a back support and has only four legs.** This means that benches, wheel chairs, sofas and other examples of chairs will not be called chairs. The definition leaves them out of the things correctly called chairs.
 - 2. A watch is a device that is worn on the wrist for telling time.** Clocks, and other time telling devices are left out.

Too broad

- A definition is **too broad** when the *definiens covers things that do not belong in the denotations of the word*. That is when the definition covers things that are not correctly called by that word.
- **Example:**
 - 1. *Student is an individual in uniform.*** Thus police, nurses, doctors, cooks, and other professions that wear uniforms are all students. (The definition is also too narrow)
 - 2. *Antelope is an animal with four legs that lives in the forest.*** Tigers, elephants, lions, and zebras will all be called antelopes



Vague

- A definition is **vague** when the *definiens does not specify adequately to determine what belongs to the word's denotation*. That is the definition is not clear or precise enough for one to be able to identify the things or objects or individuals in the world that the word refers to.
- **Example:**
 - 1. A factual statement is a statement that describes.** The question then is what does it describe. Toys? numbers? human beings? insects? Ghosts?
 - 2. A president is the head of a country.** The next question is what does “*head of a country*” mean.



Circular or Begging The Question

- A definition is **circular** when the *defineins repeats the definiendum*. Or when it contains words that are just as *obscure* as the one being defined.
- **Examples:**
 1. **Computer** is an electronic device for **computing**.
 2. **Humility** is being **humble**.
 3. A **driver** is someone who **knows how to drive** and **drives**.
- **NB. With this problem you gain nothing from the definition.**