M04-Exercise

Course in Semantics · Ling 531 / 731

Testing for truth

Narrow down the truth-conditions of the following expressions by creating hypotheses and testing them with stimuli. Be sure to employ positive and negative evidence to test your hypotheses. Do be careful of ambiguities.

1. *a sport*

   Hypothesis : A sport is a competition involving an athletic event

   Positive evidence : find a context where something is a competition and involves an athletic event, and it's true to say it's a sport.

   > Context: Tom and Sara played in a soccer game yesterday. They played against their neighbors, running and kicking the ball all over the yard.

   Target: *Soccer is a sport*.
   Expected judgment: TRUE
   Observed judgment: TRUE

   Negative evidence 1 : find a context where something is not a competition but involves an athletic event, and it's false to say it's a sport.

   > Context: Tom and Sara ran to their grandma's house. They ran as fast as their little legs could carry them, but hoped to arrive at the same time.

   Target: *Running to grandma's house is a sport*.
   Expected judgment: FALSE
   Observed judgment: FALSE

   Negative evidence 2 : find a context where something is a competition but does not involve an athletic event, and it's false to say it's a sport.

   > Context: Tom and Sara played in a chess tournament yesterday. They played against their neighbors, winning most of their matches.

   Target: *Chess is a sport*.
   Expected judgment: FALSE
   Observed judgment: FALSE

   The reason we have two sets of negative evidence is because our hypothesis has two conditions: It is a competition, and it involves an athletic event. If we are right, they both have to be true for *sport* to be true, and either one could be false for *sport* to be false. (Technically we should also test to see what happens if both conditions are false.)

2. *The Jayhawks are the champions.*
3. *college*
4. *at*
5. *over*