LING-053 Semantics 1

Homework due Friday January 23 at the beginning of class

1. Meaning is compositional, that is, the meaning of complex linguistic expressions is built from the meaning of their constituent parts. However, there are a number of cases where compositionality is restricted. One of these cases involves compound words. Below is a list of compound nouns. Divide the list below into two types: compounds whose meaning can be compositionally derived and compounds whose meaning cannot be compositionally derived. For the first type, give a paraphrase of the meaning of the compound word that makes explicit how the meaning of the compound word is derived from the meaning of its parts.

(a) blackmail
(b) can opener
(c) flight deck
(d) greenhouse
(e) half-sister
(f) self-starting (e.g. self-starting motor)
(g) leisure center
(h) mouse pad
(i) sunstroke
(j) a Wall Street-sustaining enterprise
(k) a Wall Street-sustained enterprise
(l) textbook
(m) spin doctor

2. Part I: We discussed in class indexical expressions, such as yesterday. Consider the two sentences (1) and (2). One might suppose that yesterday could be thought to have just the sense of the day before. Explain why that would be wrong, and what the meaning of yesterday is.

(1) Russia and Canada quarrelled the day before.
(2) Russia and Canada quarrelled yesterday.

Part 2: give the rule for the demonstrative this as in the following sentence:

(3) Mary doesn’t like this.

Suppose John is the speaker who uttered (3). What is the proposition that (3) expresses?
3. The following sentence is ambiguous. For each reading, come up with a situation that would make the sentence with that reading false in that situation.

(4) Every student answered a question.

4. Do the bold-faced adjectives allow both the intersective and the nonintersective readings in the following sentences? Explain your answer.

(a) Mary is a young doctor.
(b) John is a former student.
(c) You have committed an alleged crime.