Linguistics:
What do we know when we know a language?
Chomskian revolution:

Language is not just “verbal behavior” –

• Stimulus-response and associations cannot explain complexity of language use and acquisition

(6) Colorless green ideas sleep furiously
(7) The teacher holded the baby rabbits, and we patted them
Chomsky’s thesis (1957):

• Natural languages can be described as *formal languages*

• like programming languages or logic, they can be captured by means of *generative grammars*.

• Linguists look for patterns they can describe by systems of rules
  – Competence vs. performance
Richard Montague’s thesis (1960s and early 1970s)

- Natural languages can be described as *interpreted formal languages*

- Like logic, they have a semantics
  - which assigns to expressions in the language *meanings* that have to do with statements being true or false
What do we mean by meaning?

• PROSTITUTES APPEAL TO POPE
• KIDS MAKE NUTRITIOUS SNACKS
• JUVENILE COURT TO TRY SHOOTING DEFENDANT
• IRAQI HEAD SEEKS ARMS
• MAN EATING PIRANHA MISTAKENLY SOLD AS PET FISH
• STOLEN PAINTING FOUND BY TREE
• ENRAGED COW INJURES FARMER WITH AX
• SQUAD HELPS DOG BITE VICTIM
What does this mean?

• I saw her duck.