

What is semantic memory?

In modern memory theory and research the term semantic memory has been defined in a number of similar ways: Tulving (1972) defined it as "a system for receiving, retaining and transmitting information about words, concepts and classification of concepts" (Baddeley, 1976). Later the definition was widened: "general knowledge about words, concepts, and symbols, their meanings and associations, as well as rules for manipulating these concepts and symbols, as well as the individual's knowledge about the world as well as information regarding his or her own memory" (Lipinska-Terzis, 1996; Tulving, 1983).

It may be noted that already in 1976 Baddeley questioned the view of different systems in the brain, and he then preferred an "alternative way of conceptualizing the difference between remembering personal incidents and recalling information in terms of the degree of abstraction involved" (Baddeley, *ibid*). He takes an example our memory of the chemical formula for salt: "...differs from a single personal experience in being based on a large number of personal experiences, most of which happened many years ago when we first began to learn chemistry".

What Baddeley does is to take a developmental view of semantic memory: it is cumulative, and is consequently defined as our "personal and general knowledge of the world" (Baddeley, 1976, p. 318).