

MARIANA NEAGU

CLAUDIA PISOSCHI

FUNDAMENTALS OF SEMANTICS AND
PRAGMATICS

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FOREWORD

The intention of the authors was to design a book for the background of students in Philology who study English Semantics and Pragmatics and also for all those who want to get (more) acquainted with the essential aspects of communication from the perspective of the intricate relationship between form and meaning, on the one hand, and between these two facets of language and the user, on the other.

The fields of Semantics and Pragmatics are very broad and diverse and the duration of the course required a strict selection of the topics. Therefore, the book is structured in two complementary parts, one dealing with the major topics of English semantics, and the other with the traditional domains of pragmatics.

Part I. Semantics is broken up in five chapters and can be conveniently used in a one-semester course on English Semantics. Chapter 1 outlines the scope of semantics and presents an overview of the main semantic theories: diachronic semantics, structuralist semantics, semantics in generative linguistics and cognitive semantics. Chapter 2 looks into the relationship between language, thought and reality and presents two major models of the sign: the Saussurean model and the Peircean model. Chapter 3 focuses on types of linguistic meaning and emphasizes their importance in practice (e.g. translation). Chapter 4 deals with the paradigmatic sense relations studied by the two major branches of semantics: semasiology and onomasiology. Chapter 5 looks at semantic organization by discussing the issues of mental lexicon and semantic field.

Part II Pragmatics comprises six chapters dealing with the traditional domains of pragmatics: deixis, conversational implicatures, presuppositions and speech acts, politeness. Chapter 1 is an introductory one, approaching the study area of pragmatics, explaining its main concepts and terms. Chapter 2 explains the concept of deixis and its basic types, providing cross-linguistic examples. Chapter 3 approaches the domain of implicatures, focusing on conversational implicatures and conversational maxims. Chapter 4 discusses presuppositions as pragmatic inferences, their types and triggers. Chapter 5 enlarges upon speech acts (concept, levels, felicity conditions) and performativity. Chapter 6, the last one is an analysis of the relationship between the concept of politeness as a social and linguistic phenomenon and the previously discussed pragmatic domains: deixis, pragmatic inferences and speech acts.

Combining theoretical considerations and relevant examples (sometimes allowing cross-linguistic comparisons), the present volume is synthetic, but dense, clear and systematic, but requiring a deep understanding and challenging the reader to reflect on the issues approached. If it succeeds in doing that, it means that the authors have achieved the most important purpose: to arouse and/or increase the interest for language in general and the desire to be equally accurate and creative in communication.

Considering the various types of requirements specific to such a book, we are trully endebedted to our peer-reviewers and express our deep gratitude for their accurate reading and pertinent observations.

The authors

1. INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

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1.1. Scope and beginnings of semantics

Semantics is the major branch of linguistics which studies meaning communicated through language (words and sentences). It is concerned primarily with lexical meaning, grammatical meaning and sentence meaning. Generally, it is recognized that one cannot account for lexical meaning without accounting for sentence meaning and viceversa. Thus the meaning of a sentence depends upon the meaning of its constituent lexemes and the meaning of some, if not all lexemes depends upon the sentence in which they occur. Lyons (1995: 144) discusses the importance of grammatical meaning as a further component of sentence meaning.

The term 'semantics' is of relatively recent origin, being coined in the late nineteenth century from a Greek verb meaning 'to signify'. This does not mean that scholars first turned their attention to the investigation of meaning of words less than a hundred years ago. On the contrary, from the earliest times down to the present day grammarians have been interested in the meaning of words and frequently more interested in what words mean than in their syntactic function. Lyons (1985/1968:400) argues that the practical manifestation of this interest is the production of innumerable dictionaries throughout ages, not only in the west but in all parts of the world where language has been studied.

In spite of the interest in meaning manifested by philosophers, logicians and psychologists, linguists doubted that meaning could be studied as objectively and as rigorously as grammar and phonology and thus semantics came to be neglected and received proper attention only since the 1960s.

The beginnings of semantics as an independent linguistic discipline go as far back as early 19th century, to the works of the German linguists Ch. C. Reisig and Hermann Paul. Reisig was the first to formulate the

object of study of the new science of meaning which he called semasiology and conceived the new linguistic branch of study as a historical science studying the principles governing the evolution of meaning. Hermann Paul also dealt extensively with the issue of change of meaning.

The 'birth date' of semantics as a modern linguistic discipline was marked by the publication of *Essai de sémantique* (1897) where the French linguist, Michel Breal, defines semantics as 'the science of meanings of words and of the changes in their meanings'. However, in 1887, that is ten years ahead of Michel Breal, Lazăr Șăineanu published a remarkable book called *Încercare asupra semasiologiei limbei române. Studii istorice despre tranzițiunea sensurilor* (Essay on Romanian Semasiology. Historical Studies on the Transition of Meanings). This is one of the first works on semantics to have appeared anywhere. Șăineanu amply used the contributions of psychology in his attempts at identifying the semantic associations established among words and the logical laws and affinities governing the evolution of words in particular and of languages in general.

Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between the two basically different ways in which language may be viewed, the synchronic or descriptive and the diachronic or historical approach introduced a new principle of classification of linguistic theories. The next section will make an overview of the major theoretical trends in semantics, trying to show how linguists have been doing word meaning in the last century and a half.

1.2. An overview of semantic studies

Starting from the presence or absence of the referent in discussing the linguistic sign, semantic theories can be grouped in two major general approaches: (1) language-intrinsic or language-immanent approaches to semantics that exclude extra linguistic objects (referents) and relations and (2) referential or denotational (language-extrinsic) approaches to semantics that focus on the properties of the referents denoted by the linguistic signs. In what follows, the former group will be illustrated by structuralist and generative semantics while the latter group will be represented by diachronic and cognitive semantics.

1.2.1. Diachronic semantics

Diachronic or historical semantics developed through the literature on semantic change which had a golden period between the last twenty years of the 19th century and the 1940s (the 1880s and the 1940s). One of the longest treaties on semantic change is Gustaf Stern's book *Meaning and Change of Meaning*, published in 1931. Stern's principal aim was to establish a theoretically tenable and practically workable system of classification comprising all known types of sense change.

Stern's classification of semantic changes

Stern defines change of meaning as "the habitual modification, among a comparatively large number of speakers, of the traditional semantic range of a word...to denote one or more referents which it has not previously denoted or to express a new manner of apprehending one or more of its referents". (Stern 1968/1931:162)

Stern starts by classifying a large number of authentic sense changes and then formulates a theory to account for the existence of the different classes. In other words, the classes were established inductively rather than deductively. He analyses historical instances of sense change mainly with regard to the psychic processes involved and identifies seven main classes of change: substitution, analogy, shortening, nomination, (regular transfer), permutation and adequation.

Substitution is a change of meaning due to an external, non-linguistic cause. For instance, alterations in the design of ships have brought about changes of meaning in the word *ship*. It once meant only a sailing vessel; now it can mean a steam-driven vessel of quite different appearance. Therefore, the referents of a word undergo some change so that new referents are added to or substitute old ones.

Analogy occurs when a word assumes a new meaning on the analogy of some other word with which it is connected derivationally (e.g. the adjective *fast* has borrowed the sense "quick" from the middle English adverb *faste*), semantically (e.g. the special meaning of *low*, "non-dogmatic" in *Low Church* on the analogy of *High Church* where *high* means "dogmatic").

Shortening is the omission of a word from a compound expression, the remaining words carrying the total meaning that formerly belonged to the whole expression: e.g. *private* is a shortening of *private soldier* (common soldier), *periodical* is a shortening of *periodical paper/ review*.

Nomination is a change of meaning in which a name is intentionally transferred from one referent to another. Stern gives as example of nomination the convention of using proper names for units of measurement, inventions, or discoveries (e.g. *volt*, *sandwich*). Other examples include place names for products (e.g. *champagne*, *a jersey*), article of dress for person (e.g. *mackintosh*), habitual expressions for persons (e.g. *jingoes* "music-hall patriots who sing jingo songs").

(Regular) transfer is the unintentional transfer of a word from one type of referent to another one resembling it. Examples are *root* as in *root of hair* and *bed* as in *river bed*.

Permutation is the unintentional shift from a referent to another brought about by the possibility of interpreting a word in two ways in some context. *Beads* in *He is counting his beads* can mean either "prayers" (the original sense) or "little balls on a rosary".

Adequation is the change of meaning resulting from the adaptation of the meaning of a word to the actual characteristics of the referents. Stern's main example is *horn*, which, in order of historical development of meaning, denotes (i) "animal horn", (ii) "animal's horn used for music", (iii) "musical instrument made from animal's horn" and finally (iv) "instrument for producing a certain kind of sound". The change from (ii) to (iii) is an instance of adequation. Adequation differs from substitution in that the immediate shift does not lie in the referent, as in the change from (i) to (ii) or in the change from (iii) to (iv) but in the speaker's apprehension of the referent. As can be noticed, adequation occurs after other sense changes (e.g. substitution) have taken place.

Ullmann's classification of semantic changes

Stephen Ullmann (1962) proposes a "better" version of Stern's classification of semantic changes. Concerning the causes of semantic changes, Ullmann distinguishes two main approaches: A. Meillet's theory and Sperber's theory. In his article *Comment les mots changent de sens* (1904-1905) Antoine Meillet maintains that there are three main causes of semantic change, viz. linguistic, extralinguistic and social. Sperber's approach is different from other approaches in that he emphasizes the role of emotion. By seeking in emotive forces the clue to changes in meaning, Sperber (1923) focuses exactly on what the French philologist had disregarded. Although Sperber neglected the non-expressive functions of language, he introduced a new perspective for the understanding of changes of meaning and their spread. Following Ullmann (1962) we conclude that the two theories mentioned above are mutually complementary rather than exclusive.

Ullmann (1962) distinguishes between semantic changes due to linguistic conservatism and linguistic innovation. When we keep a word, in spite of the fact that the character of its referents has changed, we have - in Ullmann's terminology - an instance of linguistic conservatism. Warren (1992: 9) rightly notices that Ullmann's linguistic conservatism corresponds to Stern's substitution.

The semantic changes due to linguistic innovations are grouped into three main subclasses: transfers of names, transfers of senses and composite changes. Considering the word a union of name (form) and sense (content), Ullmann assumes that there are two possibilities: either the name or the sense of the word may change or be transferred. Both transfers of names and transfers of senses occur due to contiguity or similarity relations.

A case of *name transfer* through sense similarity is *overlook* which is related to the sense of *oversee*. Instances of *sense transfer* through sense similarity are antropomorphic transfers like *leg of a table*, *eye of a needle*, *bridge head*, etc. Sense transfers through contiguity are *sail*