On Synonymy and Other Types of Semantic Relation

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The purpose of the present paper is to re-define the so-called synonyny and other meaning relations from a purely formal point of view.

1. Meaning re-defined.

One of the principal causes why many of the discussions on the problem of meaning have failed so far and will fail again to reach satisfactorily substantial results seems to be that its terms are often undefined or at most too ill-defined to ensure the exactness of interpretation and description of facts about it. We admit that we are here exposed to an exceptionally difficult situation, for we feel that there is very little accord on the more inportant questions in this field, particularly on the notion of *meaning* itself. The popular instinct, which seems to betray itself in the deliberate identification of signification with significance (10), is in this case unreliable, though here may be a problem which certainly deserves some serious philosophical investigation. Neither the philosophers nor the linguists are generally agreed on this important question, notwithstanding that the need of cooperation between the two camps has increasingly been pressing.

a. Heterogeneous views.

Professors Fodor and Katz, in their introductory notes to the section of semantics in *The Structure of Language* (6), remark with an apology that this area of linguistics exists to-day "not as a field of scientific investigation but rather as a heterogeneous collection of proposals for the creation of such a field." Much of this pessimism would seem to be due to the actual difficulties that arise from the nature of the object of this par-

ticular study, which stretches, in the present stage, over two essentially different disciplines, namely, philosophy and linguistics. A possible way of escape out of our difficulties could only be to distinguish methodically the linguistic field of semantics from the corresponding philosopic field, while it must always be remembered that the development of the one will benefit much from the results obtained in the other field.

The popular view has identified the meaning of a word with a concept of thing, real or imaginary. Thus meaning or signification is supposed to be what a word signifies: "Vox significat mediantibus conceptibus." This is not so simple as it might seem at first sight. It is not always so easy to define a concept of a thing, in the first place. The usual practice of a dictionary, to which a common reader or speaker refers for authority in case of need, is to give a definition of the meaning or meanings of a word in synonymous terms, which in many cases require further defining, for we are as often as not referred back to the very starting point in a vicious circle. The defining of a word by means of a synonymous expression is not the meaning of that word, but rather a simple device of word translation. This device of translation depends on an analysis of word-meaning into component concepts which it is supposed to consist of. A well-known instance of systematic identification of meaning and concept is to be found in a dictionary compiled on the principles of conceptual classification of the extra-liguistic realities, such as we have in Dornseiff (4). Ch. Bally and F. Brunot have also outlined their own views of conceptual classification of the universe in linguistic terms (1,2). Dornseiff's dictionary, however, will help us to understand that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a word and a concept (Begriff), since one finds, under each catchword, word-groups as well as simple words classed together as belonging to a common conceptual field.

The psychological view of meaning, which is still current

among many who are interested in the study of language, is often a mere disguise of the logical view, as A. Marty long ago tried to show in criticizing Wundt's system of semantic study. Half a century after the appearance of the former's *Beschreibende Bedeutungslehre* (O. Funke), the authority of the orthodox psychological school is in its turn being questioned to-day.

A number of other views of meaning logically or psychologically orientated have since been published without ever arriving at final solutions, though not without some important results. These views, more or less subjective in nature, have seen in meaning either the user's subjective apprehension of the referent denoted by the word, or a certain core of sense associated with more or less emotive power evoked by the word (Ogden-Richards, Stern), or a concept denoted by the word (the glossematicians; Kronasser), or the word-content (Leisi), or a kind of the inner form of content of a morpheme or a linguistic sign (Antal), or a mental image evoked by a glosseme or the like (Noreen and others).

In more recent years the philosphers have begun to be interested in this field of study and associate themselves with semantic investigations into the problem of truth. For a bird's-eye view, R. S. Wells has classified these philosophical schools under the following groups (15):
1) The comprehensive observational group:
  a) Non-behaviouristic. (Korzybski, Ogden-Richards, Zipf, etc.)
  b) Behaviouristic. (Morris, Tolman, etc.)
2) The analytic-philosophical group.
  (Britton, Lewis, Malcolm, Russell, Wittgenstein, etc.)
3) The technical-logical group.
  (Berry, Carnap, Church, Tarski, etc.)
Wittgenstein, Morris, and Firth share a view of meaning which regards it as the use one makes of a word or a sign in

refusal to think of it as something of an entity psychological or otherwise.

Over against the philosophical schools stands the linguistic school, which in Wells's classification includes such scholars as L. Bloomfield, V. Brøndal. A.W. DeGroot, Z.S. Harris, H.M. Hoenigswald, L. Hjelmslev, R. Jakobson, E. Sapir, etc. and I may add from the current writers in this field a few others like S. Ullmann, M. Joos, U. Weinreich, and J. Lyons. We have already mentioned Firth above. Even the linguists are not unified in their views and practice. However, few of them now believe in linguistic hypostasis, a common practice of identifying meaning with an entity, which A. Schaff (12) stigmatizes as the main source of many a sin in linguistics. Those who hypostatize linguistic meaning often assert that

(1) meaning is an object, of which the sign is the name;

(2) that meaning is a property of object; or

(3) that meaning is an ideal object, or an inherent property of thought. Meaning in this sense is what is generally called 'denotatum' which a word or a sign is supposed to refer to.

Other schools would prefer to call meaning a relation of some kind or other. Prof. Schaff names five such relations in evidence in recent linguistic theories. It may be a relation

(a) between signs,

(b) between the sign and the object,

(c) between the sign and the thought about the object in question, or

(d) between the sign and human action.

The non-existence of direct relation of any kind whatever between the sign and the object has been vigorously denied since Ogden-Richards' theory of the basic triangle of meaning and there would now be very few who support the view seriously. Prof. Ullmann maintains the viewpoint (c) in his *Principles of Semantics* (1957^2). The late Prof. Firth's view (5) seems to favour

(d) and is being reinforced by his followers in Great Britain.

Prof. Schaff, a Marxist philosopher, refuses to countenance the idea of imparting absolute character to the elements of the sign situation : the speaker and the hearer, the significatum or designatum, and the sign, since, as he characteristically says, this may lead to unscientific fetishisms. He proceeds to argue in favour of 'objective behaviour' and concludes meaning to be a communication process : a relation between the men who communicate with one another by means of signs. He is naturally very brief on what he calls the linguistic view (a) of meaning, which is the lexical relation between definiendum and definiens which obtains in translation. It should not escape our notice, however, that there are other possible linguistic relations which may be studied in terms of meaning, as we intend to show in the following paragraphs, though Prof. Schaff himself does not choose to think that there may be two kinds of meaning, linguistic and philosophical.

2. Systematic study of meaning relations in language.

One of the more fruitful semantic theories in recent years has been the so-called field theory of meaning either in Trier's tradition (13) or in W. Porzig's dichotomic terms of *die aufteilende* and *einbegreifende Sprachfelder* (11). Trier's idea of fields in the semantic structure of language largely depends on his notional view of meaning that it forms a system of finely articulated networks of concepts covering the whole vocabulary of a given language. Porzig's merit, on the other hand, lies in his discovery of *Bedeutungsfelder* in syntagmatic relations, which have been unduly neglected in Trier's system.

In my recent essay (soon to be publishd) on the language of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I have tried to show to some extent how synonymy may be defined in syntactical terms as well as notionally in order to remedy the defects of the common theory of synonyms which has to depend largely on the

inevitable ambiguity of notional definitions. It is exactly at this point that Prof. J. Lyons has quite recently made a further step towards innovating the structural method of semantic study. "It is possible," he asserts, "to set up lexical subsystems ('Wortfelder') in terms of such semantic relations as sameness and difference of meaning, imcompatibility, hyponymy, etc., without the postulation of a conceptual 'Zwischenwelt'." (Lyons, p. 48.) J. Lyons rejects the conceptualist interpretation of the notion 'meaning' and at the same time seeks support for his system from the recent grammatical theory of transformation, whose influences are now being felt in increasingly wider circles of linguists. He also emphasizes the importance of the notion of context, though he does not give any detailed preliminary exposition of his idea.

In this connection, I would like also to refer to another early paper of mine on the language of English proverbs (now in *Essays*), where it was my purpose to study meaning at the level of logical relations under the four types of opposition which Prof. Cantineau first proposed (3) to apply to linguistic description. The following was the scheme adopted there:

 A. Consociative relations:
  i) identity,
  ii) inclusion, and
  iii) encroachment.
 B. Dissociative relations:
  iv) exteriority.

The four types of opposition may now be reduced, for simplicity's sake, to the major three: identity, exclusion, and inclusion (or encroachment).

In Prof. Lyons's system, meaning-relations are described from similar logical angles to those which I have referred to above, under the following four main heads: incompatibility, synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy, with further subdivisions.

It will be noted that this logical framework will be useful in referring to several types of semantic relations that obtain between linguistic signs without too much dependence upon notional categories. My own scheme of logical and semantic relations, with a few revisions, would now look something like the following:

Logical relations:	Semantic relations:
1. Identity.	1. Synonymy.
2. Exclusion.	2. Non-synonymy:
	a. Antonymy.
	b. "Allonymy".
3. Inclusion (or encroachment).	c. Hyponymy.

We have discussed meaning-relations so far without defining meaning, which still defies us to pinpoint. For the present, we will content ourselves, in default of a final answer, with a tentative definition that meaning is the use of word or sign we make in a given context of situation.

In the formal analysis of language it may be seen that the usual types of use of words are two: 1) recurrence and 2) concurrence. The same linguistic form may recur in certain environments, but it is not always true that it recurs in exactly the same meaning. Recurrent words are either a) synonymic or b) allonymic (morphologically, homonymic). On the other hand, different word-forms may be found in close consocation with one another. The main types of such concurrence of words with different forms and sometimes also with different senses are the following three:

a) synonymy,
c) antonymy, and
c) hyponymy.

These semantic relations do not always correspond to so many different syntacticel relations, but may occur in similar environments, without being formally distinguished from each

other. The absence of formal distinction is usually supplied by the context, which I here define as the linguistic formulation of discourses at various levels and the cultural knowledge of the speaker and the hearer presupposed in the act of speech communication.

I propose in the following to illustrate these views of the semantic structure of language in the synonymic or other systems of the vocabulary in a Middle English poem, *The Pearl.*

3. Study of synoymy and other semantic relations in the language of *The Pearl.*

I. Meaning relations of words in recurrence.

a) *Synonymy* may here occur in *parallel* or *various other syntagmatic relations.*

In parallel relations : S–P (in a subordinate clause) ╱ S–P (in a principal clause).

As John þe apostel hit *syȝ* wyth syȝt,

I *syȝe* þat cyty of gret renoun, 985-6.

The word 'blysse' similarly occurs in parllelism in lines 373, 384, 396, 408, and 420.

In various adjunct relations :

I leste hyr *sengely in syngulere.* 8.

Of *goud* vche *goud* is ay by-gonne ; 33.

In the following example, we have an instance of a pair of antonyms disguised in the form of a polysemic word :

Of motes two to carpe clene,

& *Jerusalem* hyȝt boþe nawþeles, 949-40,

where *motes two* refers to the Old Jerusalem (941) and the New (943).

b) *Allonymy* may occur in various syntactic relations.

Your woneȝ schulde be wyth-outen *mote.* 924.

Now tech me to þat myry *mote.* 936.

In the next line we have an instance of two similar forms occurring in different positions perhaps with an intention of punning.

So is hys *mote.* wyth-outen *moote.* 948.

II. Meaning relations of words in concurrence.

Related words, occasionally bound together by the phonaes-thetic feature of alliteration as in this poem, may occur toge-ther in coordinate or other syntactic relations. Our examples follow.

a) *Synonymy.*

In coordinate relations:

In *Augoste* in a *hyȝ seysoun* 39.

Pensyf, *payred*, I am *for-payned.* 246.

Deme Dryȝten, euer hym *adyte* 349.

My Lombe, my Lorde, my dere Juelle,

My Joy, my Blys, Leman fre—735-6.

A God, a Lorde, a Frende ful fyin. 1204.

In parallelism: with a negative transformation.

Bot by þyse holteȝ hit con not *hone*; 921.

& by þyse bonkeȝ þer I con *gele*, 931.

With an object construction:

Bot ay wolde man of *happe* more hente. 1195.

Ouer þis hyul þis *lote* I laȝte, 1205.

Of þat pryuy perle wyth-outen *spot.* 12.

þat gracios gay wyth-outen *galle*, 189.

Bot a wonder perle, wyth-oute *wemme*, 221.

In a S-P construction:

Fro spot my *spyryt* þer sprang in space. 61.

My *goste* is gon in Godeȝ grace 63.

With the connective 'and' / 'oþer':

As glente þurȝ glas þat *glowed* & *glyȝt*, 114.

Wyth lappeȝ, I *wot* & I *wene*, 201.

So watz hit *clene* & *clere* & *pure*, 227.

Fro we *in twynne* wern *towen* & *twayned*, 251.

Stynt of þy strot & *fyne* to flyte, 353.

All lys in hym to *dyȝt* & *deme.* 3g0.

— 9 —

Wyth-outen *mote* oþer *mascle* of sulpande synne, 726.

þat reiateȝ hatz so *ryche* & *ryf*, 770.

For wolle quyte so *ronk* & *ryf;* 844.

ful þ*ryuen* & þ*ro* 868.

neuer *lesyng* ne *tale vn-trwe* 897.

I am bot *mokke* & *mul* amon(c). 905.

Moteleȝ may so *meke* & *mylde*, 961.

How þay wyth lyf wern *laste* & *lade;* 1146.

Of raas þaȝ I wer *rasch* & *ronl*, 1168.

If hit be *ueray* & *soth* sermoun, 1185.

In various prepositional phrases:

To þenke hir color so clad in *clot*. 22.

þer hit doun drof in *moldeȝ* dunne; 30.

I felle vpon þat floury *flaȝt*, 57.

In Paradys *erde*, of stryf vnstrayned. 248.

b) *Antonymy*.

Antonymy occurs particularly frequently in coordinate rela-
tions and parallel constructions.

In coordinate relations:

My *blysse*, my *bale*, ȝe han ben boþe:

To dyȝe in *doel*, out of *delyt*, 642.

& loue ay God, (in) *wele* & *wo*. 342.

I yow pay in *dede* & þ*ohte*. 524.

He gef *myȝt* & als *bewte;* 765.

Wheþer *solace* ho sende oþer elleȝ *sore*, 130.

marre(d) oþer *madde*, morne & myþe, 359.

In parallelism:

& quen we *departed*, we wern *at on*; 378.

þat leueȝ our *Lorde* wolde make a lyȝe,

þat lelly hyȝte *your lyf to rayse*,

þaȝ *fortune* dyd *your flesch to dyȝe*. 306

Cf. þe blod vus boȝt fro *bale of helle*,

& delyuered vus of þe *deth seconde;* 652.

In other relations:

þaӡ bou for *sorӡe* be neuer *blyþe*. 352.

In the last example, there is no formal indication to show the concurrence of antonyms in the same context, unless we supply it from the negative form-word that marks the meaning relation of the second member.

c) *Hyponymy.*

Hyponymy seems to occur in more intricate syntactic relations than the other two types of relation.

In coordinate relations:

A *crystal* clyffe ful *relusaunt ;* 159.

& loue my *Lorde* & al his *laweӡ,* 285.

Bot wyth *sorӡ* & *syt* he mot hit craue, 663.

þat is of hert boþe *clene* & *lyӡt,* 682.

In other relations:

i) Adjunct relation :

þe *glemande glory* þat of hem glent ; 70.

As *glysnande golde* þat man con schere, 165.

Al *blysnande whyt* watz hir beau mys, 197.

Doel dystresse 337.

Braundysch & bray þy *braþeӡ breme;* 346.

þe perle *of prys* 746.

I stod as *hende* as *hawk* in halle. 184.

To bye hym a *perle* watz *mascelleӡ.* 732.

ii) Object relation :

No sauerly *saghe say* of þat syӡt, 226.

þy prayer may hys *pyte byte,* 355.

Some related terms, other than in hyponymic relations, may also stand in coordinate syntatic relation, forming a larger field of meaning, as in :

Her semblaunt sade, for *doc* oþer *erle ;* 211.

We meten so selden by *stok* oþer *ston.* 380.

Out of such consociation, it turns out, there develop in

course of time synonymous or nearly synonymous pairs of words in stereotype patterns.

III. Key-words.

It also deserves notice, in this connection, that some theme-words or *mots-clefs* frequently occur in close consociation with one another, in such a way that the meaning relation of synonymy or hyponymy grows upon them, thus providing a clue to the dominant ideas contained in the whole poem. Some of these important terms are : adubbement, blot, blysse, cortays(y)e, glory, goste, grace, innocence, lyȝt, peace, perle, Prynceȝ paye,etc.

In close consociation with the word 'adubbement' and its synonyms 'dere' and 'derworth' we find such expressions as 'þe glemand glory' (l. 70), 'precious perleȝ of Oryente' (l. 82), 'lyȝt' (119), etc.

Of half so *dere adubbemente.* 72.

The *adubbemente* of þo downeȝ *dere* 85.

Lorde, *dere* watz hit *adubbement!*

So al watz *dubbet* on *dere* asyse 87.

The *adubbemente* of þo *derworth* depe 109.

So *dere* watz hit *adubbement.* 120

Dubbed with double *perle* & dyȝte : 202.

Joy, blysse, and delyt consort together.

More haf I of *joye* & *blysse* here-inne, 577.

þe *blysful* perle wyth (gret) *delyt.* 1104.

'Perle', personified, is mentioned in association with the sense of bliss in frequent repetition.

þat er watz grounde of alle my blysse. 272.

Hit is in ground of alle blysse. 396.

Elsewhere it is 'Crystes mersy & Mary & Jon' (l. 364) or 'my Lorde þe Lamb' (l. 408) or 'Hys prese, hys prys, & hys parage', (419) that is the root and ground of bliss to the poet or to the Pearl.

The word 'perle' also occurs in the same area of meaning as the virtue of innocence.

> To bye hym a perle watz *mascelleʒ*. 732.
>
> This *ma(s)kelleʒ* perle, þat boʒt is dere, 733.
>
> & porchace by perle *maskelles*. 744.
>
> "O *maskeleʒ* Perle, in perles *pure*, 745.
>
> ... quat kyn of triys
>
> Bereʒ þe perle so *maskelleʒ ?* 756.
>
> Of *spotleʒ* perleʒ þat beren þe creste. 856.
>
> So watz hit *clene* & *cler pure*,
>
> þat precios perle þer hit watz pyʒt. 217-8.

The pearl is throughout the poem symbolic of perfect innocence, which is safe by right, by the grace of God.

> Bot in-noghe of *grace* hatz innocent; 625.

'Mercy' and 'grace' are supposed to stand in causal relation.

> & be þurʒ mercy to *grace* þryʒt, 670.

If I may be allowed here to deviate from my course into a literary aside, it will be seen that the poet's intention is to say that

> 'A parfyt þerle þat neuer fateʒ' (1058),

i.e. innocence, spotless and clean, is the highest pleasure to God and the purest bliss to man, though it is only attained through His mercy.

> He gef vus to be his homly hyne,
>
> Ande precious perleʒ vnto His pay! 1212.

A few other minor groups of words, important all the same as building blocks of the whole structure of this precious poem, occur in contrast.

> Erde: moul, clot, flaʒt.

In Paradys erde. 248. This is the only passage where the word 'erde' stands. The other terms are used in reference to the earthly conditions.

so clad in clot   22.

hit doun drof in molde3 dunne   30.

I felle vpon þat floury fla3t,   57.

Body : spyryt, goste.

For spot my spyryt þer sprang in space,

My body on balke þer bod in sweuen;   61-2.

My goste is gon in Gode3 grace   63.

Goud : lyþer.

Oþer elle3 þyn y3e to lyþer is lyfte,

For I am goud & non by-swyke3 ?   567-8.

Doel : delyt, l. 642 has already been mentioned above.

Final remarks.

We have so far studied synonymous or other semantic rela-
tions of word-occurrence under its formal aspects and tried to
bring together some facts about the contextual uses of words.
Under synonymy, for instance, we have dealt with words of
various provenance which fall in together so as to create
certain well-formed fields of association, both lexical and syntac-
tical. Synonyms are not simply clusters of similarly used words
serving the purpose of supplying a stop-gap where the poetic
need or the prose technique demands it. Sometimes they are
more than that. Some synonyms are what rhetoric has called
metaphors, as when a pearl is another name for innocence ; still
further, we may enter the world of allegory when it is told that
Pearl, the lost child, dwells now in the ' glemande glory ' of bliss,
' coronde clene in vergynte ', innocent like the Lamb of God.
Metaphor, as well as allegory, belongs, it is true, to the same
semantic category of synonymy, if we regard them merely from
the viewpoint of formal meaning relation, particularly so if these
types of expressions are found in similar syntactical environ-
ments and parallel situations to those in which their plain
equivalents occur. The difference, however, is that metaphor and
allegory are symbolic and activating forms of synonymy, and

this difference is often all what makes poetry a unique genre of literature, which gives life and power to the use of language.

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