

Titel: Propositions, [Nice1951] 046-0060

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PROPOSITIONS

(1) Semantics : Term and Domain.

The term semantics is used by many linguists to denote exclusively the "substance" of linguistic content as opposed to its form, or is even confined to facts of *la parole*. Its place in linguistics would then be that of an auxiliary science such as phonetics.

This would remain a mere question of terminology if there were any well-recognised term answering to phonemics in the way that semantics is made to answer to phonetics, to denote the science of linguistic content as established on principles of relevance analogous to those applied in phonology. But there is no such term. Such attempts as those to distinguish between semasiology and semantics have generally been made by scholars not yet familiar with newer structural principles and have in any case had little influence on current usage.

Now when a "case vide" is left waiting for a term, it is only too likely to be filled by some already existing notion which does not belong here at all. We find explicitly in the works of some scholars; implicitly in those of many more, the equation : phonematics:phonetics = morphology: semantics.

This unhappy comparison is a fruitful source of error, not least with linguists who would be the last to recognise the equation as representing their view. Instances could be cited from works proceeding from any of the principle linguistic schools.

An independent linguistic branch dealing with the semantics of *la langue* remains therefore to be founded. The questions with which it will be concerned are at present dealt with under the heading of morphology or dismissed as mere affairs of "substance", so far as they have even received attention.

The missing discipline will bear the same relation to morphology on the one side as phonematics does on the other. Morphology, so far from being irrelevant, will have a decisive role in the identification of units (the same role that it plays, though often without explicit recognition, in the identification of phonematic units). But just as the phonematic system, once established in conformity with the principles of relevance, can be treated independently of morphology, so also can the "semematic" system, without prejudice to the solidarity of the different levels. It is this system that semantics is used for below.

(2) Semantics and Morphology.

Morphological categories are not, as such, a fit object for semantic analysis. To set up a semantic scheme for the propositions or the tenses of a language, taken in isolation, is much like setting up a phonemic system for these categories, apart from the general phonemic system of the language concerned. The logical absurdity is in both cases the same.

This is not to say that morphology is irrelevant to semantics. Morphemic identity is a valuable clue to the discovery of sublogical identities beneath superficially different meanings. But is never a proof that there is, or ever was, such an identity.