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Titel: Semantics. Scope, Definitions, Methods, [Nice1951] 046-0630

Citation: ”Semantics. Scope, Definitions, Methods, [Nice1951] 046-0630”, i *Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds*, s. 4. Onlineudgave fra Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds: https://tekster.kb.dk/catalog/lh-texts-kapsel_046-shoot-wacc-1992_0005_046_Nice1951_0630_p4_bP3_TB00008/facsimile.pdf (tilgået 03. juni 2024)

Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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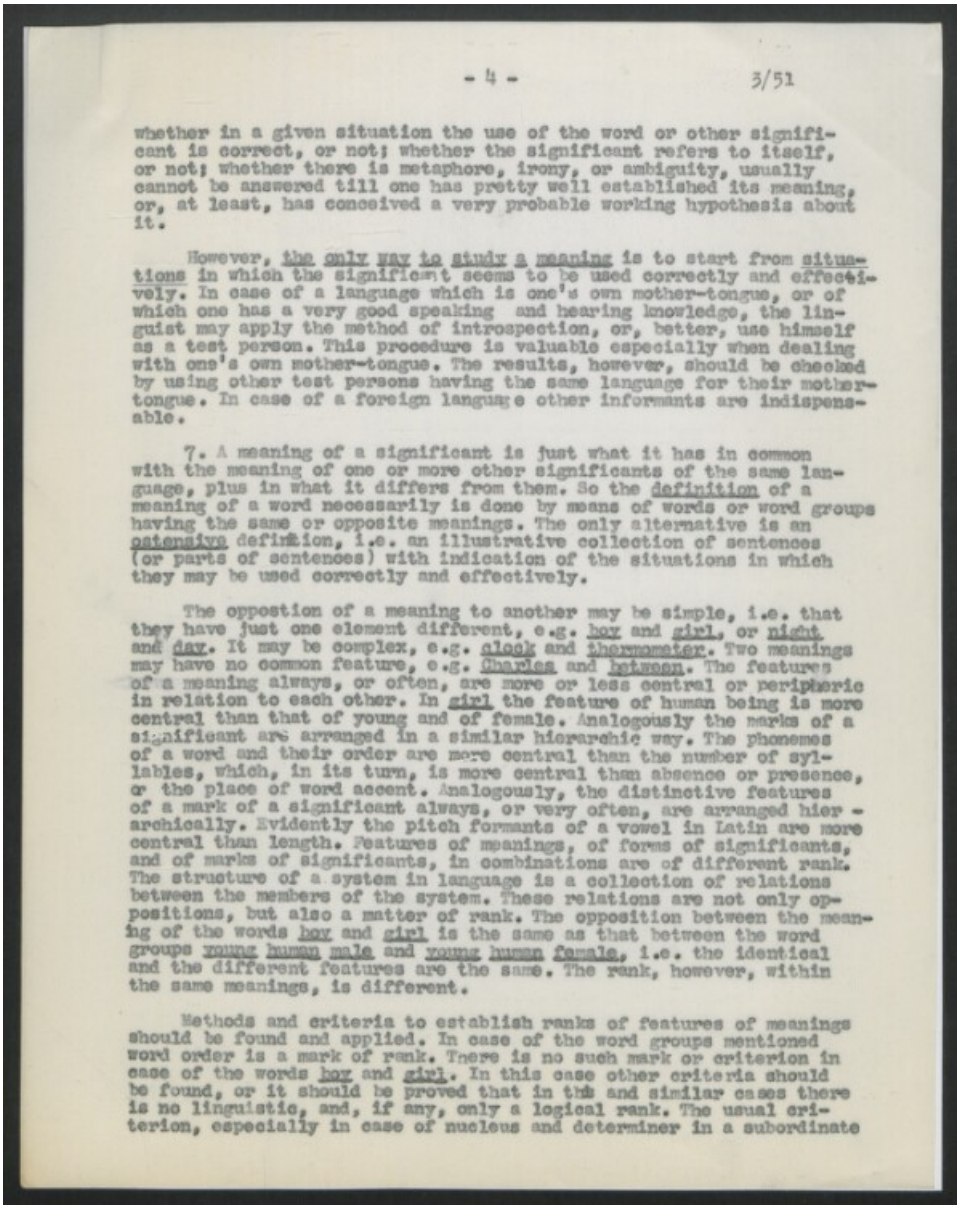

whether in a given situation the use of the word or other significant is correct, or not; whether the significant refers to itself, or not; whether there is metaphore, irony, or ambiguity, usually cannot be answered till one has pretty well established its meaning, or, at least, has conceived a very probable working hypothesis about it.

However, the only way to study a meaning is to start from situations in which the significant seems to be used correctly and effectively. In case of a language which is one's own mother-tongue, or of which one has a very good speaking and hearing knowledge, the linguist may apply the method of introspection, or, better, use himself as a test person. This procedure is valuable especially when dealing with one's own mother-tongue. The results, however, should be checked by using other test persons having the same language for their mother-tongue. In case of a foreign language other informants are indispensable.

7. A meaning of a significant is just what it has in common with the meaning of one or more other significants of the same language, plus in what it differs from them. So the definition of a meaning of a word necessarily is done by means of words or word groups having the same or opposite meanings. The only alternative is an ostensive definition, i.e. an illustrative collection of sentences (or parts of sentences) with indication of the situations in which they may be used correctly and effectively.

The oppostion of a meaning to another may be simple, i.e. that they have just one element different, e.g. boy and girl, or night and day. It may be complex, e.g. cloak and thermometer. Two meanings may have no common feature, e.g. Charles and between. The features of a meaning always, or often, are more or less central or peripheric in relation to each other. In girl the feature of human being is more central than that of young and of female. Analogously the marks of a significant are arranged in a similar hierarchic way. The phonemes of a word and their order are more central than the number of syllables, which, in its turn, is more central than absence or presence, or the place of word accent. Analogously, the distinctive features of a mark of a significant always, or very often, are arranged hierarchically. Evidently the pitch formants of a vowel in Latin are more central than length. Features of meanings, of forms of significants, and of marks of significants, in combinations are of different rank. The structure of a system in language is a collection of relations between the members of the system. These relations are not only oppositions, but also a matter of rank. The opposition between the meaning of the words boy and girl is the same as that between the word groups young human male and young human female, i.e. the identical and the different features are the same. The rank, however, within the same meanings, is different.

Methods and criteria to establish ranks of features of meanings should be found and applied. In case of the word groups mentioned word order is a mark of rank. There is no such mark or criterion in case of the words boy and girl. In this case other criteria should be found, or it should be proved that in this and similar cases there is no linguistic, and, if any, only a logical rank. The usual criterion, especially in case of nucleus and determiner in a subordinate