

Titel: Semantics. Scope, Definitions, Methods, [Nice1951] 046-0650

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word group, is based upon the definition that if a combination a plus b is such that a without b can be used in a similar function, e.g. syntactically, but not b without a, a is called more central than b. For instance There were small is not usual or correct, There were birds is. So in the group small birds the word birds is more central than small. In applying this criterion, however, disturbing factors of various kinds have to be taken into account. For instance in many birds the word birds is more central than many, though There were many is correct.

The same problems exist as to the rank of features of forms, and of marks of significants.

8. As a meaning is something opposed to meanings of other significants in the same language, and a significant in an actual situation functions as a clue (term of Alan H. Gardiner) owing to the fact that there are such oppositions, the method of studying meanings is analogous to the study of forms of significants, and of features of marks. It is the procedure of comparing in order to establish common elements and different elements. Thus by comparing the forms man and gan, or (the) import and (to) import marks of forms of significants are established: phonemes and accents. Thus by comparing h, b, i, d, k, g distinguishing features of phonemes are established. Thus by comparing boy and girl as to their meanings, common and different features are established.

There seem to be two different kinds of things that should be compared at the same time. First, in case of referential meanings, the things referred to themselves (either objects, or persons, or qualities of objects, etc., or processes, or relations, etc.), and, in case of attitudinal meanings, such as meanings of sentence-words: interjections, and yes, no, etc., the states of mind or speaker's attitudes in the actual situations. Second, the contextual use of the significants themselves, in case of words the valence of the words, i.e. their ability of being used as a nucleus of definite type of groups, or as determiner in a definite type of group, and as determiner of a certain rank. For instance substantives may be used as a nucleus in a group substantive plus adjective. An adjective may be used as a determiner of a substantive (good wine), or of a verb (the wine is good), but of lower rank than a deictic word, as is shown by word order: this good wine, not: good the wine. Similarly of a lower rank than a numeral: these two good boys, not these good two boys, or rarely, and in that case owing to a disturbing factor. In case of bound morphemes, such as cases or tenses, the valence of the words in which they occur may be established, i.e. identities and differences. So in Latin a substantive in a genitive case, i.e. with the morpheme of the genitive, usually is determiner of another substantive (para pecuniae, part of the money), in an ablative case usually of a verb (pecunia adiuvaro, to help with money).

A very interesting example of applying the first method is offered by William E. Bull's paper AN EXPLANATORY STUDY OF THE NATURE OF ACTIONS AND THE FUNCTIONS OF VERBS IN SPANISH, and his QUEDAR and QUEDARSE: A STUDY OF CONTRASTIVE RANGES (Hispania 32, 64-73, 1949, and Language 26, 467-480, 1950).

An interesting synthesis of the problem of meaning in language