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SEMANTIC STATUS OF THE WORD ON THE LANGUAGE LEVELS

It is well-known that modern linguistics treats language as a system (or a system of systems) with a corresponding structure organizing it. In spite of the various meanings attached to these terms, which at times are contradictory and interchangeable, in this work they are used in their current meaning - philosophic and scientific, namely as: a multitude of elements, with fixed relations and interrelations among them, forming a whole, unity and as: structure and internal structure of organization of the system, which appears as a unity of the stable, regular interrelations of its elements.

For the purpose of this investigation, after abstracting of speech on the account of language as a system (the basic dychotomy of F. de Saussure), it is also admissible to abstract the specific character of the system's elements and to examine chiefly the relations between these elements, the structure and organization i. e. the structure of the language system. This approach, as it is well-known, is characteristic of structuralism and its various schools and trends. For the sake of adequacy with the object however, the structuralist study stands in need of the preservation of the unity of the elements of the system and its integrity. This requirement necessitates the creation of theories, covering the levels of language as a whole, paying the necessary attention to its element and mainly to the relations among them on each level.

I. Here the attention is focused on clarifying the complex and differently ranked relations among the levels of language regarding the place of the word as a basic language unit in them and more concretely the place of the semantic word on the semantic level, so that it may be determined most of all formally and structurally.

The question of the separation and establishing of the language units is one of the general and most complex issues of linguistics. Despite the fact that each linguistic trend has worked for a long time with its own operational units, a unified and generally acknowledged complete theory of language units is still lacking. The development of such a theory requires as a basis one complete and precise theory of language levels. This question is of vital importance to any systematic-structural approach and research of language and it is not by chance that especially recently, ever greater successes have been marked in the field of the so called stratificational theories (from stratum -- level).

While as far as the phonological and grammatical levels are concerned we can assume that the problems have been generally solved and the corresponding units have been established, no one can say the same in connection with the sphere of semantic level.

Notwithstanding the differences between the modern stratificational theories, they are based on the Ferdinand de Saussure's¹ theory of language and on the glossematics of L. Hjelmslev², and they have been viewed in a different light after the report of E. Benvenist „Levels of Language Analysis“³. Characteristic feature of all stratificational theories is their too great attention (and respectively their great successes) to the lower levels of language, including its plan of expression (the second basical dychotomy) and ignoring its plan of content, i. e. the meaning, and devoid of it the basic unit -- the word as a sign is inadequate.

Probably the reasons for this are the two old formalistic preconceived notions of structuralism: 1. the conviction that a structural analysis should not study the meaning, and 2. the postulation of language levels in the hierarchial order of: phoneme — morpheme — word form — sentence, which actually excludes the semantic level. As far as the first prejudice is concerned, it may be regarded as overcome to a certain extent, but we can not say the same about the second one. This hierarchial order has been known as early as the ancient grammars and from a grammatical point of view it is correct and adequate, but that does not mean that it is sufficient for general linguistics. This preconceived notion leads to misunderstanding of Benveniste's idea that „there is no transition from the sign to the utterance neither by the formation of sintagma nor by any other way“⁴ and the treatment of the sentence on the „categorhematic level“ as „its only characteristic feature“⁵. Thus, for instance, V. Gak⁶ and A. Ufimtseva⁷ incorrectly criticise the statement of Benveniste that: „There is a difference of principle between the sentence and other linguistic units. The essence of the difference is the fact that the sentence contains signs but it is not a sign by itself.“ The misunderstanding derives from the fact that the sentence (as well as the ordinary phrase) is not a higher linguistic level in a stratificational-hierarchical (vertically) sense, but it is a tactical unit of speech (formed in a time span, horizontal). The sentence continues to be grammatical unit, comprised on the level of lexemes, untill they reach the top of the linguistic hierarchy — the semantic level, and only then they form in speech an adequate speech — language unit — the utterance. (see chart I). The same reasons make the

L A N G U A G E				S P E E C H
	Starta	Abstract Units	Concrete Units	Parameters
SEMANTIC	6. Semantemic	semanteme		-T, -R, +V, -M, +C semant.
	5. Sememic	sememe	hyperseme	+T, +R, +V, +M, +C Semotactics
GRAMMAR	4. Lexemic	Lexeme	seme	+C gram phon -C sem Syntax
	3. Morphemic	morpheme	word form	+C gram phon -C sem Morphotactics
PHONOLOGY	2. Phonemic	phoneme	sillable	-T, -R, +V, -M, +C phonol. -C sem. gram Phonotactics
	1. Phonetic	phonological component	phone	+T, +R, +V, +M, -C Spoken chain +T, +R, +V, +M, -C

Chart I

where: T — tactics (syntax); R — speech realization; V — variation (in abstr. plan); M — manifestation; C — content.

„functional“ stratification of the Prague linguists F. Danesh and K. Hausenblas⁸ inadequate. They postulate the levels of language in the following hierarchial order: phonematic, morphematic, word forms, sentences, and utterances. The stratificational scheme of L. Vassilev⁹ includes the semantic level as well (his study is semantic) but he repeats the hierarchial scheme of Danesh and Hausenblas on the whole. It is not by chance

at again in a semantic study M. Nikitin notes more or less correctly but a little bit ar feched: „A number of concepts on stratification of language units are unsatisfactory because of the fact that they do not distinguish between the two features—the functional and formal classification of language units, but they confuse them or at best—ry to combine them“; „the classification of the units according to these two features xcludes a number of border cases, when the function does not correspond to „its due orm“¹⁰, because any adequate theory should satisfy these conditions.

The stratificational theory of S. Lamb¹¹ may be accepted as the most adequate ne, and relieved of the contradictions that have been mentioned. And it is in accord ith the answer to L. Hjelmslev's question: „Is it possible to assume that the maenings f the word form a structure?“¹², as well as with the amendments of F. de Saussure's heory, introduced by E. Benveniste.¹³ In addition to the semiotic (on the plan of lan- uage sign), he introduces the semantic (on the plan of speech) concept of language, is two fundamentally different ways of signifying. The first one is „inherent in the lan- uage sign and endows it with the status of integral unit“, and the second one „ori- ginating in speech“ and „based on all referent relations“. Empyrically S. Lamb estab- lishes the existence of six strata in language: *phonetic*, *phonemic*, *morphemic*, *lexemic*, *sememic*, and *semantemic*, classified into three main levels*: phonological, gram- matical and semological (semantical), with corresponding units and corresponding sub-units, relating the units of each two neighbouring strata¹⁴. He studies separately he combination of the different units from one and the same level in time and in speech, such as lexemes in the sentence, for instance.

Each of these stratum systems has its own syntax, and in language on the whole we can observe not only one but several different tactical systems. A lot of misunderstand- ings in connection with some of the stratificational theories are due to certain under- estimation of the fact that, figuratively speaking, this type of stratification is „vertical“ and it treats minimal (but complete) linguistic units of radically different character, hence heir fundamentally different way of combination, and it is not „horizontal“, the case when each language-speech unit is considered as consisting of smaller entities, which contain even smaller ones in turn, based on one and the same principle. Descriptive linguistics serves as a perfect example of the conception of language as a sum total of horizontal elementary constituents.

Certain principal relations in the structural study of language levels should also be represented here for the sake of greater precision. Each level (and each stratum as well) consists of two types of units—abstract, unobservable invariant language constructs (like phoneme, morpheme etc.), and—concrete, variants of the abstract ones, which can be separated immediately out of speech (phone, syllable, etc.). We should stress the fact that the concrete units are still language ones, belonging to language as an abstract system, and not speech ones, and as regards the abstract units they are in relation of *manifestation*, and (still) not in a relation of *realisation* in speech, in the real utterance. (see chart I). In this case it is important to note that even this theory which has separated two semantic strata—sememic and semantemic, the content-semantic relations have been treated rather cursorily, or as the author himself has marked: „The assortment of various semological phenomena among the patterns in the two strata systems is at present tentative and in part uncertain“¹⁵

II. For adequate clarity and completeness of the content analysis of the two strata of the semantic level, as the two highest in language, special attention should be paid to

* Here the terms stratum and level do not coincide. *Level* is in its traditional sense, and the *pho-* nological level includes the phonetic and phonemic *strata*; the grammatical level includes the morphemic and lexemic strata; and the semantic level—sememic and semantemic.

their elements and the relations among them, i. e. the meaningful word and the whole set of kinds and types of meanings belonging to it and their corresponding interrelations, forming the semantic structure of the word.

First of all, if we view the meaningful (semantic) word from modern semiotic point it is an original psychological blending between logical and physical reality, which comprises its meaning as a linguistic sign. Even if it is viewed in absolute statics, the word as a sign contains the four basic components of the two principal dychotomies: language — speech, and content — expression, (signified — signifier and designified — designifier) and the point of intersection between them is its meaning. (see chart II),

	Content	Expression
Language	<u>signified</u>	<u>signifier</u>
Speech	<u>designified</u>	<u>designifier</u>

Chart II

	Content	Substance	Expression
Language			
Speech		MEANING	

Chart III

When we introduce the psychic sphere of language-speech processes inbetween language and speech, as it moves the point—meaning outlines a segment. And if between the plan of expression and the plan of content we introduce the field of the substantial (vs. formal — the third dychotomy), the point — meaning outlines a segment perpendicular to the first one, and both form the quadrangle of meaning in the sphere of psychic and substantial. Thus the scheme of the word — sign and its meaning acquire the form well known of the scheme of E. Atayan¹⁶. (see chart III, over)

For the purpose of this investigation we may disregard the plan of expression. Thus the point of meaning in absolute statics of the sign and centre of the quadrangle of meaning, in the process of inner movement of the sign appears to be on the boundary of substantial and formal is (in accordance with the theory of L. Hjelmslev) on one hand, and on the border line between language and speech (in accordance with the theory of E. Atayan), on the other. In this plan, in the meaning of the language sign we observe language meaning, and speech meaning, and general meaning, and meaning in general terms. Depending on the aspect and the needs of the investigation, one of these meanings may acquire priority, but this would not mean that it may be viewed completely separated from the rest. Developed in this way the scheme of the word — sign acquires the following outlines (the word sign and its meaning); see chart IV; p. 37.

The scheme shows that any underlining of one moment of the meaning or another, at the expense of the rest of them, leads to a corresponding deformation of the figure and it covers one or another sphere of the integral and indivisible sign by rotation (i. e. turning round one of its sides as if round an axis). All possible relations on this scheme outline the configuration of the linguistic (language-speech) sphere and on the plan of content. Thus the following scheme of the components of meaning in an

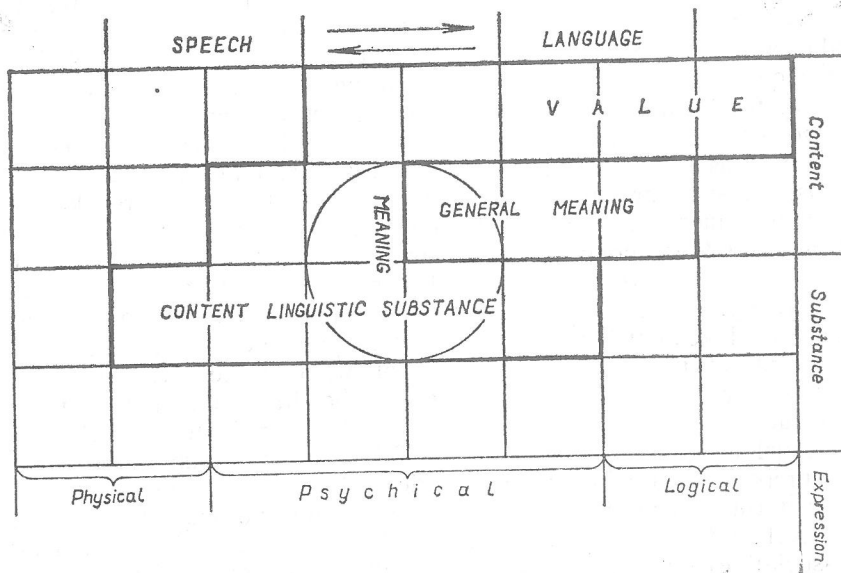


Chart IV

abstract and in a purely formal plan is achieved as well as the next one, coming as the sequence of the former and indicating the concrete components of the formal—substantive meaning: see chart V.

On the previous scheme, where the value can be found on the left column, general meaning (in broad terms) on the middle one and language—speech content substance—on the right one, which is in accordance in principle with the theory of Hjelm

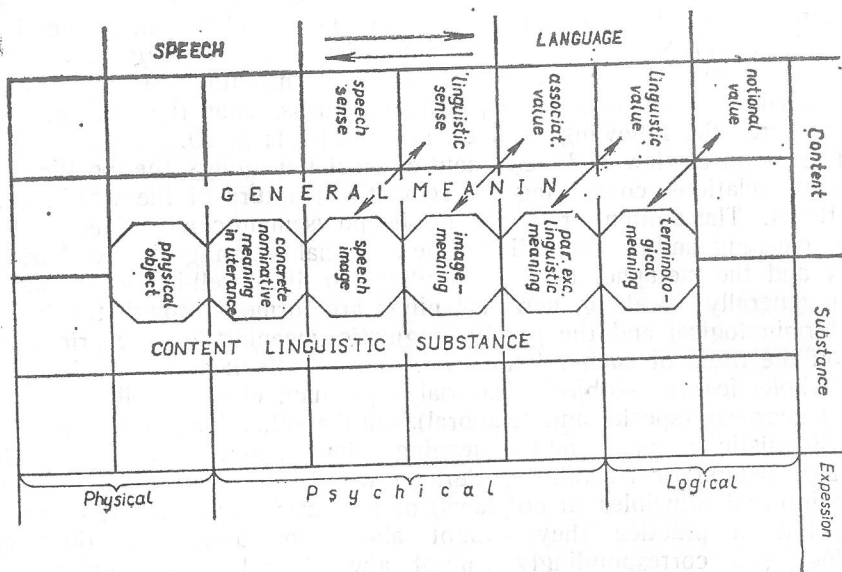


Chart V

slev¹⁷, as well as an equivalence between the ideal (pure form), the material form and the substance, and the meaning on the border line between the last two. However this abstract fundamental position does not solve the concrete semantic problems and more specifically the question about the structure formed by the meanings in the abstract plan of the pure form, and about the kinds and types of meaning.

The last scheme, in its spread out form, gives a clear idea of the components of value and meaning, as well as of the various relations and interrelations between them. Here in an abstract structural plan we distinguish, first of all, three kinds of fundamentally different values — logical, purely linguistic and associative (psycholinguistic). It is characteristic of these components of language value that they possess certain independence and that they are placed on relatively different semantic strata and each of them, respectively, correlates with the corresponding component of the meaning, not directly and on one level, but the corresponding difference of one stratum in the levels.

From what has been said up till now, it follows that the presence of a system in lexis and more concretely in the meanings cannot be drawn on an uniform principle — the abstract values of F. de Saussure and L. Hjelmslev, neither according to the method of traditional componential analysis or the theories of semantic fields, because this value is not purely linguistic but chiefly logical, expressed through language and all semantic fields, formed according to this principle, are nothing else but a taxonomic hierarchies of certain thematic groups. Except for this kind of value, language-psychological (associative) value is observed as well, on the basis of which the so called associative fields may be composed, which are a subject of psycholinguistics, and which we can find in associative dictionaries. The purely linguistic value is something different from the two mentioned values and it stands between them and has a direct relation with them. A real linguistic semantic field can be created only on the basis of this kind of value. Similar, in a sense, are the procedures, in the content and under the corrective of the logical and associative values, used by U. Karaulov¹⁸.

The spread out scheme of the linguistic sign and its components proves categorically also the real existence of general meaning as an abstraction of a lower degree than that of the value and as a specific transition from the abstract to the concrete — the meaning. From what has been said by now and from the logic of the scheme it follows that three basic variants of the meaning can be postulated and general meaning being the invariant: *terminological*, *par exc. linguistic* and *meaning — image*. Each of them is invariant of one or several concrete variants — meanings of the semantic word with their eventual concrete practical equivalent in *usus*. Thus the semantic structure of the word acquires the following outlines: see chart VI; p. 39.

III. From the point of view of development of special meanings, the specificity of inner relations and interrelations, comprising the semantic structure of the word-sign, is also a point of interest. The content relations in the polysemantic word lead to the development of the meaning and the formation of new special meanings in two basic ways — the metonymy and the metaphor (as its according to the well-known classical terminology). Most generally speaking, new meanings are formed through the interrelation between the terminological and the purely linguistic meaning on the principle of metonymy and on the basis of such relations as: cause — effect; action — Aim; process — result; part — whole; feature — object; material — product; etc., as well as on the basis of any kind of nearness (special and temporal). On the other hand from the interaction of the purely linguistic meaning and the meaning — image, new figurative meanings are obtained through metaphoric transitions. Perhaps we should stress once again the fact that these are internal principles (if not laws) of semantic development of the polysemantic word, but in practice they cannot always be active in their concrete special meanings, and correspondingly cannot always find a constant place in the

speech usus, which is due to various extralinguistic factors, leading to defectiveness of the semantic paradigms. We can find a proof of their probability not only and not so much in the linguistic theories, as much as in the poetic usage of meanings, and even in the course of everyday speech practice. This semantic development has intralanguage border lines and a limit, which is the borderline between polisemy and homonymy. It is the general meaning and general value that determine these borderlines and do not permit the destruction of semantic integrity—the polysemantic word, as well as ensure the identification of homonymy.

IV. In conclusion the following statements, bearing fundamental importance to the semantic of natural languages, should be pointed out:

1. On a stratificational-hierarchic plan we observe a dual semantic of language, expressed in the two semantic strata—the sememe one (purely linguistically) and the semanteme one (logically, expressed through the means of natural language). The semanteme stratum is the transition from the natural-linguistic to the logical and contains the notion value of the linguistic sign. This transition is observed most clearly in the terminological meaning, where the linguistic form is filled with logical substance (see chart V). On this level the semanteme stands as well, —an abstract language unit on a meta-level, expressed through the hyperseme—an abstract language unit presenting the word out of context, separated from context or the way we see it in the left column of uni-lingual dictionaries. In fact it represents something of a general language-speech meaning, including and uniting in itself all types of meanings of the linguistic sign: the terminological, the purely linguistic, the language meaning—image, the speech image, the concrete nominative meaning in the utterance, as well as the meaning of the object—phenomenon itself in an ontologically-referential plan. On the other hand, this linguistic construction may be obtained by induction from the real special meanings and usages in the speech usus. The fundamental equivalence of the

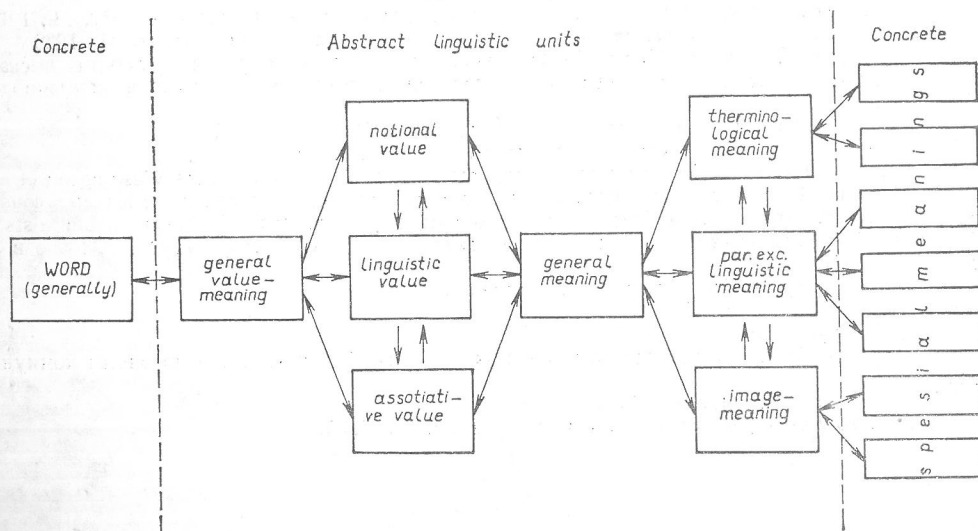


Chart VI

deductively postulated types of meaning with the real meanings from which the induction has been drawn in this meta-unit (the semanteme), is a transition of a high degree from the abstract to the concrete, from theory — hypothesis to practice, and it is a proof of its truthfulness and adequateness.

2. On a formal-substantival plan we observe a tripple semantic, expressed through the three different fundamental types of value: notional, linguistic and associative which due to the differences on substantival plan as well, require different conceptual forms: a notion, a purely linguistic concept and image. The interaction of the forms with their corresponding substantives results in the appearance of the three types of meaning: the terminological, the purely linguistic, and the meaning — image, united in natural language by one linguistic unit — the semantic word, placed on a lower level in comparison with the lexeme.

On the basis of everything that has been said up to here we may establish the semantic status of the word in general language system and structure — on stratificational-hierarchical plan, and on internal-structural plan, as an organization of its different elements, the meanings and their interrelations. Thus we come to the conclusion about the tripple semantic character of natural language on a structural-systematic plan (on a sign level) and about the fundamentally different semantic character on a super-sign level and in the utterance, which have also been confirmed by the concrete speech-usus practice.

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