I. Theoretical Semiotics/Sémiotique théorique

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The Transition from Signification to Supersignification in the Natural Languages

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It is more or less generally accepted in modern linguistics, that the borderline unit of the system is the word as a sign bearing a certain meaning and sense which stands in our conscience for a certain object. It is this property of its units - to signify - that defines a linguistic system as a semiotic one. And, as is necessary for any semiotic system, these units should be limited in number. There should also be rules of arranging them in figures. These figures should be independant of the nature and of the number of speech products which the system allows to be created.

It has become a basic scientific requirement for linguistics, too, to be able to offer a full description of at least one natural language, or of at least one of its parts - in this case, its semantics - or else, to create a model, preferably working by itself, and by means of a computer. This requirement is a sequence of the principle of mathematical modelling according to which an object can be considered actual when and only when, an algorithm for its description has been created, as a practical model, bringing together pure theory and the real object, thus proving the adequacy of the theory - hypothesis.

Research in the field of modelling has shown that the part of language that presents greatest difficulties, is semantics, and, in particular, lexical semantics. The modelling of this sphere requires the construction of a *Semantic minimum* as a theoretical construction representative of the whole lexical system in its integrity. Such a Semantic Minimum - Dictionary, comprised of about 850 units, has been created by the author of this paper for the Bulgarian language. It was used as practical verification of some theoretical issues, concerning the semantics of the natural languages:

1/ The lexico-semantic system of a language can be structured in lexico-semantic fields, forming an overall scheme. Central in it is a zero field, comprised of about 350 units, having as its core a nominative-substantival unit: the word *man, hanse*, the system is anthropocentric.

2/ All the words in this Dictionary have been described only by means of the units contained in its alphabetic part. This proves that it is possible to create a metalanguage capable of ensuring the autonomy of a dictionary. It should be pointed out, however, that this is autonomy of the lexico-semantic system of the language, provided that it includes the grammatical semantics

on the one hand and the terminological meaning of some words, such as those naming some popular animals and plants, on the other.

Of a particular importance for the creation of such an autonomous dictionary is to solve the problem of the so-called "semantic primitives". Such non-definable units (elements) are in this case several pairs of lexical items expressing modality, such as: *triabva - zhelaja* (must - want to), *mozhe - moga* (can - be able to), *chuvstvuvam - vuzpriemam* (feel - perceive) - perceptuality; an activity in general: *stava - pravja* (become - make), as well as the represential expressions: *kazvam - govorja* (tell - speak). All of these are united around the basic verb *sum* (be) and can even be defined though somewhat roughly and artificially by means of *sum*. The verb *sum* in its turn is represented by purely grammatical means as: 1. Processuality (action), 2. State, and 3. Existentiality - as abstract grammatical essences. Thus, the two central units of the lexico-semantic system, the substantival *chovek* (a man) and the verbal *sum* (to be), combined in an actual utterance (and not as abstract linguistic units in a dictionary) make up the elementary predicate structure "*Chovek sum*" (I am a man), which is the more general sense of the referential predicate structure "*Az sum chovek*" (I am a man), from where "*Az mislja neshto za neshto*" (I think something about something). The subjects of the structure, taken separately, bear imminently the sense of the predicate, and vice versa.

The problems of the Semantic Minimum - Dictionary which we have formulated so far show that it is difficult to talk about absolute autonomy. In spite of the fact that the headwords have been defined only by means of the units, contained in the minimum corpus. The meta-language function of the definitions is in fact a meta-speech one, and its way of signifying is different: every definition is in its essence an utterance (although a specific type of utterance) and is also based on reference, but a reference to the more abstract "object", presented by the defined word as a headword in the dictionary. The utterance itself, apart from the semantics of the words-signs comprising it has in addition the semantics of a predicate structure.

It is one more way of proving Benveniste's idea that the language combines two different ways of signification: the semiotic and the semantic. The first is inherent to the linguistic sign and gives it a status of a wholesome unit. It is the language's base for signification and the material, necessary for *expressing*. The second, semantic one, is connected with the speech - the role of the language to produce utterances. Thus, the language gives us a unique example for a system which is semiotic both as a formal structure and in its functioning.

From all this it may follow, that there is really no transition from the sign to the utterance, but a realistic approach to the problem calls for an attention to the existence of the following paradox: If someone (e.g. a foreigner) has learned enough words and grammatical rules for combining them almost without any connection with the natural linguistic surroundings of practising that same language, he can express himself correctly. When however, he finds himself in the natural linguistic surroundings it turns out, that he speaks

correctly, but unlike any native speaker. On the other hand, a child, even before it has learned how to read and write or even before it can separate conscientiously the words as linguistic units (signs), very easily and quickly learns a language in its corresponding linguistic surroundings. Even if it still makes some (grammatical) mistakes, a child speaks adequately in different situations.

It is significant that such a paradox is characteristic not only for people who have not mastered completely a given language, but for the way in which a language is used in a society as a whole, and even for the definitions of all dictionaries. A critical analysis shows that apart from the use in definitions of the grammatical semantics of the utterance, the autonomy of dictionaries is incomplete for yet another reason. Consciously or unintentionally, they make use of some peculiar units, having the characteristic features of complex sign of both nominative and predicative type. These are language-speech units contiguous between the words-signs and the set-phrases and idioms. They are comparatively stable unities, such as: *pri nuzhda* (if necessary), *zdrav smisul* (common sense), *v sustojanie sum* (be able to), *edin i susht* (one and the same), *po silata na* (in accordance with), *vuv forma sum* (in the shape of), *za razlika ot* (as distinct from), *ostavjam nastrana* (to leave aside), *chista proba* (par excellence) etc. These phrases have not been an object of research, aiming at defining their type and relation to one another, as well as their relation towards the word-signs.

Concerning this type of phrases we are faced once again with the question whether they are units, and if they are linguistic units, are they signs, or are they units of another system. Granted that we have assumed as a basic linguistic unit the word-sign, and as a basic unit of speech the utterance, these forms are contiguous between the two: they are not phraseological (or idiomatic) enough to be taken as language units, and they are not freely formed referential predicate structured utterances, either. They are most probably units of speech, which have been created in it, and have gained a foothold in the idiolects of a certain group of its speakers as a means of referring to certain situations which in time either disintegrate to their initial nominative signs or gain the status of a specific type of complex sociocultural signs. In all probability, the bearers of a language do not think of them as separate units, which may be the reason why they have remained to question the wide range of their distribution in actual speech, both oral and written. Via literature and mass media they get a firm status in the language - speech practice of the language community, thus creating the specific features of the separate genres and sociolects, starting from their models and going all the way to the clichés and the stylistic bad taste and failures. It is not unlikely, that the mastering of these language-speech units brings about enrichment of the so-called standard, or cultural, languages. These are, of course, largely preliminary statements, which require a serious further study of the problem.

From the point of view of this particular aspect of the problem we are dealing with here, it is important to establish the character and status of these language-speech units in view of the division between the sphere of the language-sign, and that of speech-utterance, especially if there is no direct

transition from one to the other. They are obviously not "a link" of the transition of the semiotic semiology into a semantic one, but it is just as obvious that on the systematic plane they are the transitory link between the roughly divided and separated *langue* and *parole* in the language-speech universum, as "elementary" units of the genre, taken not only narrowly (in the strictly literary sense), but also in its wider understanding as spheres of language-speech usage.

We can even, in spite of the risk of some hastiness and insufficient terminological precision, assume them to be complex linguistic and sociocultural signs. It is beyond any doubt, however, that their detailed and serious investigation would contribute to the understanding of both the semiotic and the semantic spheres of the natural languages, so as to establish what they have in common, although not in terms of a transition from the first to the second. Maybe these very units (or similar types of units) will prove to be the units of the "second generation semiology", prognosticated by Benveniste.