A FEW REMARKS ON LEXICAL LINGUISTICS

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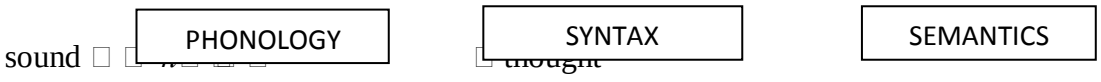
Abstract: The present paper investigates lexical semantics as a significant theory in the history of linguistics which has been proved to be highly relevant and beneficial to the study of a variety of language aspects. Lexical semantics has provided our current research with important tools in the analysis of essential notions such as meaning, lexicon, word and the analysis of meaning according to a background frame or scene.

Keywords: lexical semantics, cognitive linguistics, lexicon, meaning, language.

Van Ginneken (1907) considered semantics to be that part of linguistics investigating the history of words, sorting and classifying their development with a view to discovering and comparing the psychological and social profound causes governing them, all that in order to highlight certain semantic rules, generally valid. These rules will also be psychological and sociopsychological, given that words may exist and develop only through people's psychology and social life.

This definition suggests the position cognitive grammar will take regarding the study of the linguistic phenomena as the result of human cognition and the materialization of the principles according to which it functions.

The importance of semantics varies from one theory to another. In order to better visualize the place of semantics as a component of grammar and its relationship with other constituent parts such as phonology and syntax, J. Saeed (2000: 9) proposes the following diagram:



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Concepts such as the lexicon[1], the word or lexeme and the meaning occupy a central position in semantics. Linguists have only recently showed interest in the lexicon as "a repository of relatively time-stable culturally-shared well-coded knowledge about our external-physical, social-cultural and internal-mental universe. By *relatively time-stable* one means knowledge that is not in rapid flux i.e. not unique episodic information. By *culturally shared* one means that when launching into communication, speakers take it for granted that words have roughly the same for all members of the same cultural/linguistic community. By *well-coded* one means that each chunk of lexically-stored knowledge is more-or-less uniquely – or at least strongly – associated with its own perceptual code-label" (Givón and Malle, 2002: 125). The multitude of words, present in the human mind, is called by Aitchison (2003: 6) the *mental dictionary* or the *mental lexicon*. Despite some resemblances between our mental words and those inventoried in dictionaries and other lexicographical analysis, they remain quite different. One of the main features of dictionaries is that they provide words listed in alphabetical order. As for the mental words, one may be tempted to accept the hypothesis that cultivated speakers can alphabetically store things as, for instance, in the case of telephone directories and indexes. The validity of this statement is seriously shattered by the difficulty to accept that normal mistakes in a conversation could be substituted by others such as using, for example, '*dregs'* or '*drench'* instead of the word '*dress',* all neighbors in the dictionary. However, according to Aitchinson (2003: 5), constructions of the following type are more plausible: '*He told a funny antidote'* with the use of '*antidote'* instead of '*anecdote'* or '*The doctor listened to her chest with a periscope'* with '*periscope'* substituting '*stethoscope'*. These instances clearly prove that the alphabetical order is not a valid reason for the production of the mistakes. Aspects such as the initial or final sounds of lexemes, the stress pattern and the stressed vowel are the real essential elements organizing the mental lexicon.

Another important distinction between these structures consists in the fact that the mental lexicon is not fixed and is subject to evolution. New structures are introduced into language not only because of incorrect pronunciation or change in meaning of the existing words but also due to the creation of new words or meanings within the communicative process. For instance, "a caller asking an American telephone operator about long-distance charges was told: '*You'll have to ask a zero'*. The caller has no difficulty in interpreting

[1] *The Greek word for dictionary.*

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this as the person you can reach on the telephone on dialing zero. Similarly, it was not difficult for native speakers to guess that '*The newsboy porched the newspaper yesterday'* meant '*The newsboy left the newspaper in the porch"* (Aitchinson, 2003: 12).

As already stated, the lexicon is constituted by words or in a technical language, lexemes or lexical units. A word may have three different uses:

"Word1 = phonological/orthographic (dies/died, man/men) - Word-Form

Word2 = abstract unit (die, man) - Lexeme

Word3 = grammatical (come 1. Present, 2. Past participle) - Word

Word1 consists of a sequence of sounds, syllables or letters. '*Dies'* and '*died'* are obviously different words in this sense. On a deeper level, such different forms obviously belong to the same abstract unit ('*die'* or '*man'*), the dictionary word2 or in technical terms, the same lexeme. Finally, the same sequence of letters (such as '*come'*) may represent a different grammatical word3." (Lipka, 2002: 24-31). Therefore, a lexeme may be an abstract unit of language, a group of variants i.e. word-forms or a sign at a certain linguistic level, the lexicon. It must not be envisaged as the smallest unit of the language system since it may be classified as simple, complex or we can even talk about a phrasal lexeme.

In lexical semantics, one aspect is fully agreed upon namely that each unit at any linguistic level has the same objective of communicating meaning. In other words, at least from one point of view, meaning is the result of the interaction of all linguistic levels. If substitutions of words or any other modification at the level of phonemes occur, the meaning can be affected. Thus, semantics investigates meaning transmitted through language i.e. the meaning of words and sentences. Nonetheless, it does not cover the complete sphere of word meaning, mainly focusing on the lexical word meaning at the expense of the grammatical form. In other words, scholars in this field are more concerned with the analysis of classes such as verbs, nouns or adjectives, etc. "Lexical semantics focuses on content words, such words cannot be studied in an ungrammatical vacuum. Some lexical properties have effects throughout the sentence. So, for instance, a difference between the verbs *spot* and *see* can be described in terms of aspectual properties of the verbs: *spot* describes a punctual event, while *see* does not. This in turn affects which tense and aspect markers can be present in the same clause and how such markers are interpreted. So, '*I saw the bird all day long'* can describe a continuous seeing event, while

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'*I spotted the bird all daylong'* must be interpreted as repeated instances of spotting events". (Murphy 2004)

Researchers in this field have mostly concentrated their attention on two dimensions namely word and sentence meaning and the nature of their relationship. The knowledge of a language brings about the storage of a multitude of words which constitutes the already-mentioned mental lexicon that is not completely static given that people are constantly learning and forgetting words. The previous classification of lexemes into simple, complex and phrasal functions as a confirmation of the statement that phrases and sentences have meaning as well. The difference between these two aspects of meaning can be described in terms of productivity. Even though new words might be created, it is largely admitted that this is less common than creating new sentences. Often, people link words in a novel way that results in new utterances, never heard or used before and with a strong probability to be understood by the audience, with implications for the semantic description. Unlike the meanings of words that can be stored in a lexicon, the meaning of sentences is, according to Saeed (2000: 10-13), the sum of the meaning of its component parts and depends on the manner in which they are combined.

With regard to the meaning of lexical units, Cruse (1986: 84-85) thinks that "each one consists of an indefinite number of contextual relations but at the same time constitutes a unified whole. Hence it is not unnatural to speak of a lexical unit standing in a particular semantic relation to other lexical units. The paradox does not present itself in quite so acute a form if a weaker version of the contextual approach is adopted, which holds merely that the meaning of a lexical unit reveals itself through its contextual relations, without commitment as to what meaning *really is*". Each semantic relation can be described in terms of varying significance because the more a relation of this type recurs in pairs or groups of connected lexical units, the more important its status. Even in this case, there is also a degree of variability in the sense that recurrent relations are not of an equal semantic interest.

Let us take, for example, Cruse's (1986: 84-85) investigation of the correspondence between some sense verbs like '*see'* - a marker of an involuntary visual experience, '*look at'* – the contemplation of a fixed visual element or *'watch'* - the attention given to a potential change in the visual stimulus. If the same type of analysis is applied to other sensory modalities, the following pairs would be constituted: '*hear – listen to, taste1- taste2, smell1 – smell2, touch1 – feel'*. Only one hearing verb (*listen to*)

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denoting a voluntary action on the part of the perceiver corresponds to the visual different forms '*look at'* and '*watch'*. Things are more confusing in the case of the other senses where verbs like '*taste, smell,touch* and *feel'* do not relate in the same manner as *hear* and *listen to.*

With regard to the Romanian and French equivalents in the visual mode, no change occurs and the '*look at - watch'* contrast is still present in the former language (a vedea - *a se uita la - a privi*) while in the latter, its sphere is poorer, being reduced to the pair (voir-*regarder)*. As for audition, there is a more evident degree of resemblance given that we can perfectly parallel the meaning of '*hear - listen to'* with the Romanian couple '*a auzi - a asculta'* and the French one '*entendre - écouter'*. The other three verbs '*taste1, smell1, touch1'* are correlated in Romanian with the lexical unit '*a* simţi1'and in French with '*sentir1'*. The remaining verbs '*taste2, smell2,feel'* are matched in the first language with '*a gusta, a mirosi, a atinge'* whereas in the second with '*goûter, sentir2* and *toucher'*. The examination of perception verbs under the form of general lexical items in parallel series represents a powerful studying tool in lexical semantics that will be used in our entire thesis.

Cruse (1986: 86) also talks about the existence of two types of relationships namely the paradigmatic sense relations and the syntagmatic relations. In his book, he concentrates mostly on the study of the first group even though he acknowledges that their examination is somehow interconnected, involving a constant passage from one category to another. "Paradigmatic relations, for the most part, reflect the way infinitely and continuously varied experienced reality is apprehended and controlled through being categorized, subcategorized and graded along specific dimensions of variation. (…) Syntagmatic aspects of lexical meaning, on the other hand, serve discourse cohesion adding necessary informational redundancy to the message, at the same time controlling the semantic contribution of individual utterance elements through disambiguation, for instance, or by signalling alternative – e.g. figurative – strategies of interpretation."

We shall now very briefly discuss a few notions that will serve as tools for our following analysis of the semantic relations of verbs of perception. In Cruse's opinion, the basic relations that can be established between classes are those of:

1). (a) cognitive synonymy (a relation of identity founded on the existence of some common elements):

e.g. *car / automobile*

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(b) hyponymy (a class entirely contains another):

e.g. '*This is a chair'.* entails '*This is furniture.'*

(c) compatibility (some common semantic characteristics but different as to traits which are not opposable):

e.g. *cat / pet*

It's a cat / It's not a cat.

It's a pet / It's not a pet.

There is no connection between *cat* and *pet* but they share the same superordinate: animal.

(d) incompatibility (no common elements):

'It's a woman.' entails '*It's not a man.'*

We are aware that this classification has also its shortcomings, enumerated by the author himself, given that it may sometimes be very difficult to place an element in a category of possible referents (*particularly, wind, etc*.) or set a connection between a word like '*dragon'* and the category of animals. Nevertheless, some of these relations particularly that of cognitive synonymy are often reflected in the translators' work as we shall see in our corpus-based analysis. Our research will show that quite often a perception verb is converted into a subordinate term of the field of perception, behaving like a synonym of the original verbal form.

New perspectives emerge in lexical semantics, especially with the attention shown by linguists (notably Lakoff 1987) to the study of polysemy. We shall try to investigate the manner in which the versions of prototype theory proposed by Rosch (1975) and Kleiber (1990) deal with polysemic lexemes.

Cognitive researchers tackle the aspect of polysemy in a novel way concentrating on the systematic and natural manner the multiple meanings of a lexical unit are related. Acting as a real ccognitive reference point, the prototype plays a fundamental role in categorization as the membership to categories of the other entities is decided based on the comparison with this prototype. The prototype theory states that aspects of language can be studied in a dual system: the horizontal level, which categorizes members from the centre to the periphery on the basis of family resemblance, and the vertical level, or hyponymic with supraordinates, basic and subordinate terms. Diachronically, the concepts of a language, which enter polysemous structures and relate to other members, are prototypical.

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It was considered that due to the impossibility to apply it to all areas of vocabulary, Rosch's (1975) prototype theory has encountered difficulties in providing satisfactory answers in lexical semantics regarding the notion of polysemy. The extended version proposed by Kleiber (1990: 158) no longer implies the existence of a central entity, which 'represents' the category, either as the best element or as a combination of typical properties relative to which the members of the category are evaluated. As we have said before, he insists upon the existence of at least one common trait between the categorized entities.

Unlike Rosch's standard version, the extended version has a 'multi-referential' vision of categories. The representation of the internal organization of categories evolves. It is now the lexical unit that constitutes the indicator of the category and no longer the prototype. Coupled with the idea of categorial multi-referentiality, the extended version appears as the solution to the analysis of polysemy.

Based on the fact that the same linguistic unit may include several different meanings, polysemy is now perceived as a special case of prototype-based categorization constructed around the idea that meanings of words belong to a category (G. Kleiber, 1990:
162). In this regard, Lakoff (1987) states that the application of the prototype theory to the study of meanings of words brings order where there apparently was only chaos. Because it no longer deals with the psychological field of natural and mental categorization, it really becomes "une théorie de l'organisation sémantique des lexemes polysémiques"[2](Kleiber, 1990: 174). Indeed, this extended version considers that polysemic lexemes form categories based on more or less numerous and heterogenous referential sub-categories (or meaning).

The connection between polysemic meanings is described in terms of the presence of common elements, one of the meanings of the lexical unit is considered to be the first one while the others appear as literal and figurative secondary meanings obtained through derivational operations (metaphor, metonymy, image schemas...). Despite criticism, all these theories have had a strong impact on lexical semantics, particularly among cognitive linguists.

[2] Our translation into English: "a theory of semantic organization of polysemic lexemes".

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