



ESSAY ON A TRANS-THEORETICAL REFLECTION ON THE SYSTEMATICITY OF MEANING IN LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT

The current systematicity of the study of linguistic meaning marks the end of a history incepted since the time of comparative grammars. That history can even be traced back by going beyond the period of comparative linguistics. It is actually that very history that this paper aims to retrieve and briefly reconstruct partially by laying an emphasis upon some of the major steps of the process which led to the systematic study of meaning and significations. Throughout an analysis which claims to be trans-theoretical, that is covering several theories, this cursory investigation intends to go over some of the major linguistic theories, schools and concepts to know of their approaches to the phenomenon of meaning. As a result of the study, it came out that semantics was formed out of prelinguistic ideas and concepts combined with the contribution of several theories of structural linguistics. To those theories of structural linguistics, it could be added the contribution of several theories of syntax on the one hand and diverse discourse theories on the other hand.

Key words: Enunciative Semantics, Generative Grammar, Lexical Semantics, Semic Analysis, Structural Syntax

RESUME

La systématique des études actuelles du sens linguistique consacre l'achèvement d'une histoire amorcée depuis l'époque de la grammaire comparée. Les origines de l'histoire de la réflexion sur le sens linguistique pourraient même être recherchées au-delà de cette période. C'est cette histoire que cette étude vise à reconstituer en mettant en évidence les grandes articulations du processus qui a conduit à l'étude systématique du sens et des significations. C'est à travers une analyse qui se veut trans-théorique, c'est-à-dire traversant plusieurs théories, qu'elle compte parvenir à cette réflexion en interrogeant les grandes théories, les écoles linguistiques et les grands concepts de base pour connaître de leurs approches de la question du sens. De ce fait, on a pu constater à l'issue de la présente étude, que pour se constituer en une discipline autonome intégrée à la linguistique, la sémantique a dû bénéficier d'idées antérieures à la linguistique moderne. À cela, on pourrait faire remarquer l'apport indéniable des théories d'extraction structuraliste, celui des théories syntaxiques d'une part, et la contribution foisonnante des théories relevant de l'analyse du discours d'autre part.

Mots clés : Sémantique énonciative, Grammaire générative, Sémantique lexicale, Analyse Sémique, Syntaxe structurale

INTRODUCTION

At its inception under the auspices of Ferdinand De Saussure, and with a view to being regarded as a positive science, modern linguistics had to rule out semantics from its scope to pre-empt it from being one of its sub-fields. As such, semantics could not qualify as a scientific discipline due to its lack of systematicity and to its speculative approach to the analysis of linguistic meaning. That lack of systematicity could even be reflected in how the forerunners of the theorization of meaning issues struggled to coin a name for a prospective new field of knowledge which was negotiating the status as a formal science. Among those attempts to name the then science to be, we could mention Bühler's (1934) *sematology*, Noreen's (1887) *semology* or even Lady Welby's (1903, 1907, 1911) *significs*.

However, as a result of the previous scientific adventures and from Michel Bréal's more successful attempt to systematize the study of meaning till now, through the coinage of the word *semantics*, the latter has finally turned into an integrated sub-field of linguistics, perceived as a science of language. Did that somewhat progressive and smooth integration of semantics into the broader field of linguistics aim at just meeting the requirements to be regarded as the scientific study of meaning or, did that integration mean that it had then turned into a nomothetical science capable of systematizing the analysis of meaning through a rigorous formalization of language facts or scientific phenomena which are likely to fall under its jurisdiction? Hence the need to conduct a trans-theoretical reflection on meaning issues in linguistics by means of the topic worded as follows, "*Essay on a Trans-theoretical Reflection on the Systematicity of Meaning in Linguistics*".

This study aims to appraise the current alleged scientific standing claimed by semantics. Therefore, to be able to puzzle out the debate raised on the systematicity of semantics, the current study will not be grounded within a single and unique theoretical framework but it will rather resort to a bunch of contemporary theories of linguistics to work out the problem it raises. However, even though the study turns down the intent to be confined or limited to a single theory, it at least navigates the three major turning points of the history of linguistics by singling out a few theories out of each period to conduct a scientific reflection on meaning issues. Under those circumstances, the first part of this paper will draw on theories relevant to structuralism while the second part resorts to theories related to syntax. The third part of the study will convene discourse theories to appraise their contribution to the systematization of meaning in linguistics.

1. The Debate on Meaning Issues within the Framework of Structural Linguistics

Within the framework of structural linguistics, the debate on meaning issues evolves around three standpoints. The first standpoint will stem from Ferdinand De Saussure allegedly considered as the father of modern linguistics. The second standpoint encompasses various approaches of the other three major schools of structural linguistics that is Glossematics, Functionalism and Distributionalism. As for the third standpoint, it will be geared toward Lucien Tesnière's Structural Syntax rightfully categorized as a theory of structural linguistics though its methods of investigation seem rather closer to those of dependency grammars.

1.1. *The Evolution of the Reflection on Meaning Issues from the Period of Comparative Grammar to the Era of Structural Linguistics*

When laying the foundations of structural linguistics at its inception, Saussure primarily postulated the existence of a foundational dichotomy referred to as *langue* vs *parole*, in other words *language* vs *discourse*. He therefore defined *langue* as being a system of signs which makes it possible for the members of a given speech community to interact and communicate. *Langue* which is considered as a social reality or fact supersedes individual speakers who are unable to wither it or undermine its integrity. As for *parole*, it is regarded as the individual appropriation, grasp or actualization of *langue* by a single speaker in an actual conversational situation or setting. Thus, all of those measures taken by Saussure when streamlining the basic concepts of a science to be aimed at ensuring the falsifiability of findings in research works geared toward the scientific study of human language. By doing that, Saussure ruled out *parole* due to its instability and its inability to guarantee the genuineness of scientific reflections on language, and he upheld *langue* for it could scientifically be relied upon. Hence the idea that the primary goal of linguistics is to study *langue* in itself and on its own right.

After considering *langue* as a system of signs, Saussure describes the linguistic sign as a two-element molecule, those two elements being the *signifier* and the *signified*. The *signifier* is regarded as the written or phonemic support of the *signified* which is viewed as the concept the *signifier* refers to. Those two terminologies, that is, the *signifier* and the *signified*, are closely tied, dependent upon each other and cannot be broken apart.

However, it is that very approach to the linguistic sign by Saussure which later inspired and triggered the very first reflections and analyses of meaning issues in linguistics. Thus, that major epistemological choice made by Saussure was wrapped up and encapsulated in his famous formula worded as follows, "*language is a form and not a substance*" (Saussure, 1916 p.169). Yet, it is Hjelmslev who will help better understand that thought by Saussure. As a matter of fact, Hjelmslev equates *form* with *langue*, that is,

language, and *substance* with *meaning*. Thus, *langue* which was equated with *form*, was singled out and raised as the object of study of modern linguistics while *substance* which refers to meaning was automatically ruled out of the scope of the then science which was being commissioned. But to have a better understanding of Saussure's attitude of rejection toward a possible scientific study of meaning, one first of all needs to understand the epistemological environment at the time when Saussure's theoretical thoughts emerged.

Primarily trained and educated in the mainstream of his lifetime, that is, comparative grammar, it can be hypothesized that Saussure might have been influenced by the scientific position of his fellow comparatists toward meaning issues. As for comparatists of Saussure's lifetime, the lack of a systematized accounting of meaning issues was quite enough to pre-empt it from being a part of general linguistics, the new science which was then under construction and at an embryonic stage.

While the rejection of the study of meaning issues was a commonly shared idea which prospered among specialists of comparative grammar at that time, Michel Bréal, the then holder of the Chair of Comparative Grammar at the *Collège de France* and at the same time secretary to the *Société de Linguistique de Paris (SIL)*, stood up against the then mainstream and postulated the possibility of systematizing the study of meaning in his book titled "*Essai de Sémantique ou Science des Significations*" (Bréal, 1897). Thus, two apparently antagonistic views, regarding the study of meaning, then emerged as a result of the advent of modern linguistics under the auspices of Ferdinand de Saussure. In spite of those two positions which seem poles apart, the study of meaning still seemed speculative.

Consequently, the presentation of the evolution of the reflection on linguistic meaning will oppose, on the one hand, the schools of thought which carried over the comparatist tradition characterized by a sense of ostracism toward the study of meaning, and that of schools which rather upheld the idea of a possible systematization of meaning and its integration into general linguistics as a fully-fledged subdiscipline of it on its own right, on the other hand.

1.2. Approaches to the Study of Meaning among Schools of Structural Linguistics

As said earlier on, Bréal's ideas which seemed revolutionary at that time unknowingly formalized the dichotomic perception and approach to meaning issues. Thus, in this part of the study, that dichotomic perception had already surfaced within the framework of structural linguistics as it could be seen through the positions held by the different schools of structural linguistics, that is, the School of Copenhagen, the School of Functionalism, and to a larger extent, Structural Syntax.

1.2.1. Hjelmslev and the Reflection on Meaning in Glossematics

Hjelmslev carried over the foundational principles and basic concepts primarily developed by Saussure. Thus, for Hjelmslev, if we consider that *language* is a *form* and not a *substance*, linguistic analyses should therefore be geared towards the *form* and leave the study of meaning, which is equated with *substance*, to other sciences other than linguistics, in other words, to non-linguistic disciplines. As a result of that, he states the following,

Les considérations que nous avons été amenés à faire à la suite de la distinction établie par Saussure entre forme et substance conduisent à reconnaître que la langue est une forme et qu'il existe en dehors de cette forme une matière non-linguistique « la substance » saussurienne – le sens, qui contracte une fonction avec cette forme. Alors qu'il revient à la linguistique d'analyser la forme des langues, il sera tout aussi naturel que les autres sciences en analysent le sens. (Hjelmslev, 1984, p. 99)

Basically, to better understand the position held by glossematicians in relation to the issue of meaning in linguistics, one first of all needs to understand the epistemological environment which prompted the advent of glossematics. As a matter of fact, glossematics was against the fact that non-linguistic sciences like anthropology, history, philosophy, etc. claimed to analyze human language based on extralinguistic premises which have nothing to do with it. He consequently contended that human language could provide from within everything needed to analyze itself. Hence the principle of immanence as opposed to that of transcendence. However, not all schools of structural linguistics would side with that standpoint mainly held by the School of Geneva pioneered by Saussure and by the Glossematic School headed by Hjelmslev.

1.2.2. The issue of meaning as perceived by the Prague School

André Martinet, one of the prominent figures of the Prague School of linguistics also known as the School of Functionalism, especially European functionalism as opposed to American functionalism, claimed that linguistic analyses could not be run or conducted without taking into account the issue of meaning. However, he recommended a cautious attitude when analyzing language from a semantic point of view. He consequently stated that, “ *On ne saurait donc recommander une méthode qui fait totale abstraction du sens des unités significatives, mais il n'en faut pas moins se prémunir contre les dangers auxquels on s'expose lorsqu'on aborde sans précaution le domaine sémantique.* ” (Martinet, 1970, p.34)

As for Roman Jakobson, inspired by the theoretical thoughts developed by Boaz, he affirms that linguistic analyses cannot be thought of by being oblivious of meaning matters. He even thinks that it would reversely be a nonsense to turn a blind eye to meaning issues when conducting a linguistic analysis. Thus, to wrap up the ideas

developed up to now, we could say that this is how the early debates as to whether the study of meaning had to be taken into account in linguistic analyses evolved.

On seeing all those somewhat conflicting positions held by diverse scientific figures, and also the hesitations as to whether semantics could be a subdiscipline which is a part of general linguistics, it could easily be figured out how it struggled to turn into an autonomous science with its own method of investigation, the lack of which was viewed as its Achilles heel. But, for semantics to really start negotiating the status of a true scientific discipline, some prominent linguists among whom we could rightfully name Cosériu, E. (1964, 1981, 1985), Greimas, J.A. (1983), and Pottier, B. (1974, 1992, 2018) would suggest theoretical frameworks within which a systematic analysis of linguistic meaning could be conducted. However, it seems auspicious, at this point, to draw one's attention to the fact that the very first models of semantic studies were confined to the analysis of lexical units only; hence the advent of a method by the name of lexical semantics. Basically, analyses in lexical semantics simply consisted in borrowing the method of analysis in use in phonological analysis, which then proved effective, to apply it to the study of the meaning of lexical units. That method gave birth to what was later termed *Semic Analysis* or *Componential Analysis*. That componential analysis consisted in tracing and retrieving the semic and distinctive features of meaningful units. So, the examples below are given to illustrate and grasp the close relationship between a phonological analysis and the semantic analysis of lexical units as it was practiced when semantic analyses were then at their early stage. Thus, the phonological analysis targets three phonemes, that is, /p/, /b/ and /m/ while the componential analysis targets three lexical units, that is, *car*, *taxi* and *bus*.

Tableau 1. Phonological Analysis

	/p/	/b/	/m/
<i>Sonority</i>	-	+	+
<i>Labialization</i>	+	+	+
<i>Nasalization</i>	-	-	+
<i>Stop</i>	+	+	+

Each distinctive feature is called a *pheme* and the set of *phemes* of a phoneme is called a *phememe*.

Tableau 2. Componential analysis

	<i>Automobile</i>	<i>Transportation of Human beings</i>	<i>Individual</i>	<i>Not free</i>	<i>for 4 to 6 persons</i>	<i>More than 6 persons</i>
<i>Car</i>	+	+	+	-	+	-
<i>Taxi</i>	+	+	-	+	+	-
<i>Bus</i>	+	+	-	+	-	+

With the advent of componential analysis, semantics was being gradually recognized by general linguistics as a systematized method of meaning analysis. That systematized study of meaning will keep on getting more and more sophisticated with a view to going beyond the mere analysis of lexical units, in other words, an analysis strictly limited to lexical units. Under those circumstances, Lucien Tesnière's Structural Syntax would suggest a semantic analysis which is not confined to lexical units only.

1.2.3. Lucien Tesnière's Structural Syntax

Just as the way Saussure and the other thinkers of structural linguistics did, Lucien Tesnière's goal was to develop a general theory of human language. However, Tesnière's theory was a theory of syntax with two separate but complementary components, that is, a *static syntax* on the one hand, and a *dynamic syntax* on the other hand. Thus, the dynamic side of Lucien Tesnière's theory aimed at accounting for human natural speech particularly viewed as an activity. That speaking activity could be equated with what Saussure used to refer to as *parole*. That particular approach to *parole* which turns it into an object of linguistic analysis seems to be contrary to what Saussure rather upheld. By and large, Tesnière's theory can be thought of as resting on three foundational pillars which are:

- *A redefinition of the levels of analysis which amounts to building an interface between morphology, syntax and semantics;*
- *A Static Syntax, and*
- *A Dynamic Syntax.*

However, in this paper whose objective is to trace back the essentials of the history of semantics, a special emphasis will rather be laid upon the first characteristic of Tesnière's theory, that is the redefinition of the levels of analysis in conjunction with the semantic side of it. Within the framework of the redefinition of the levels of analysis, Tesnière made a distinction between what is referred to as the *plan of thought* (abstraction or plan of contents) and the *plan of language* (or of the form). Then Tesnière will break down the plan of language into the *internal form* (abstract) and the *external form* (sound wrapping). Thus, the study of the internal form is geared towards syntax. However, though they evolve concurrently from each other, the contents (semantics) and the dynamic and internal form (structural syntax) seem to be independent from each other as well. This explains why a sentence can be semantically absurd, though it is structurally perfect and correct as illustrated in the French sentences¹ below.

(a) *Le silence vertébral indispose la voile licite.*

¹ Those sentences remind of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957).

(b) *Le signal vert indique la voie libre.*

Thus, sentence (a) seems structurally acceptable but semantically absurd while sentence (b) is acceptable both structurally and semantically.

It finally comes out that for Lucien Tesnière, semantics appears as the actual foundation of syntax, that is, of structural syntax as stated as follows, “ *le structural n’a de raison d’être que dans le sémantique.* ”

In conclusion, it can be kept in mind that within Lucien Tesnière’s Theory, semantic interpretation is not confined to the level of lexical units only. But meaning is also to be sought after at the level of the sentence. Consequently, it can be noticed that the analysis of meaning has shifted from the mere lexical level to the syntactic one, thus, paving the way for theories of generative syntax and their own perspective of meaning issues.

2. The Issue of Meaning Viewed from the Perspective of Syntactic Theories

In this part of the paper, the account of the perspective of syntactic theories on meaning issues will be limited to that of Chomsky’s interpretive semantics as opposed to generative semantics rather upheld by syntacticians opposing Chomsky’s views.

2.1. Chomsky’s Interpretive View on Semantics

With a view to relating meaning issues to syntax, we will resort to Chomsky’s syntax. Going for Chomsky’s approach in this part can be justified by the fact that his theory is believed to be standing out among the theories of syntax, and thus to have an unparalleled strength to account for language facts. Thus, Chomsky’s theory is peculiar in the sense that it is both generative and transformational. Though the final objective is to reflect on meaning the way it has evolved in Chomsky’s syntax from the standard theory to the minimalist program, an emphasis will rather be laid on the standard theory, that is, how reflections on meaning issues were incepted.

In *Syntactic Structures*, at the very beginning of Chomsky’s syntax, a clear cut distinction was made between syntax, morphology and phonology on the one hand, and a distinction between syntax and semantics on the other hand. Therefore, through the distinction between syntax and semantics, Chomsky clearly intended to rule out the latter out of the scope of the first in order to lift it up as the sole object of his theory. However, preferring syntax to semantics could not be taken to mean that Chomsky totally denied the relevance of meaning issues in syntactic analyses. For he even recognized, in the first state of his grammar, that deep structure was the right place for semantic interpretation. To illustrate that, let’s consider the French sentences below:

(a) *Pierre promet à Marie de venir.*

(b) *Pierre permet à Marie de venir.*

Though they seem to be close to each other from a structural perspective, those two sentences seem to conceal grammatical features which imply two different semantic interpretations. While sentence (a) is about the arrival of *Pierre*, sentence (b) is rather about the arrival of *Marie*. Therefore, those two sentences seem to have two surface structures which seem alike while their deep structures seem to be different. Thus, from that separation between syntax and semantics, which translates into a subtle rejection of semantics away from the realm of syntactic analyses, some generativists like Katz, Fodor and Postal would undertake their own and separate research works with a view to attaching a certain semantic interpretation theory to Chomsky's theory of syntax after having criticized it. This might justify why in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* Chomsky contends that a semantic interpretation should be conducted drawing concurrently on deep structure and surface structure. In other words, that reconsideration of Chomsky's initial position considerably contributed to the advancement of his theory. It is that advancement in Syntax which is reported by Le Goffic and Fuchs in the following words (*Le Goffic, P. et Fuchs, C., 1992 p.76*),

De simple mécanisme génératif syntaxique, la grammaire générative tend ainsi à devenir une théorie complète du langage intégrant aussi l'étude du sens et l'étude des sons, tout en subordonnant celles-ci à ce qui constitue le centre du modèle, à savoir la composante syntaxique.

Based on the standpoint of those syntacticians who opposed Chomsky's views on semantic interpretation, it could easily be derived that in syntax, the realm of semantics portrayed two conflicting positions in such a way that we could have on the one hand interpretivists and on the other hand semanticists, in other words, promoters of interpretive semantics versus generative semantics.

2.2. The Rise and Fall of Generative Semantics

Generative Semantics originated in a collaborative work conducted mainly by Paul Postal and George Lakoff. It especially emerged further to the revisions of the transformational syntactic framework proposed in Katz and Postal (1964) and Chomsky (1965). Though it ended up falling, its contribution to the scientific reflection on the systematization and formalization of linguistic meaning could not be denied even though the said contribution might be questioned to some extent. As a matter of fact, "[...] *Generative Semantics failed because of a lack of theoretical consistency and empirical verification* (Koerner, 2002, p.115). The reasons for its failure could be of two orders. Thus, on the one hand, and internally, the decline of Generative Semantics is mainly due to the somewhat inconsistency of the theoretical proposals made by generative semanticists (Koerner, 2002, p.124). On the other hand, the decline was also due to external factors which were social, institutional, career matters and finally factors

related to the personalities involved in the promotion of Generative Semantics. However, in spite of all that, it remains a key step in the history of the formation of semantics as a formal and scientific discipline relevant to general linguistics.

Primarily based on the analysis of mere lexical units, we finally got to Tesnière and Chomsky's theories which made it possible to analyze meaning at a higher level that is the level of the sentence, in other words at the syntactic level. However, those theories mentioned above could be reproached with the fact that they favored analyses limited to lexical units on the one hand or to a concatenation of those lexical units within a sentence.

But, to widen the scope of the analyses of meaning, it seemed auspicious to take into account the contribution of the speaker who is very often influenced by the elements of the extralinguistic world in the construction and reconstruction of meaning in discourse. Hence the advent of analyses of meaning within the frameworks referred to as discourse semantics or enunciative semantics which make it possible to go beyond the syntactic level and embrace discourse as a whole.

3. Towards a Semantics of Discourse

This part of the article accounts for the way theories of discourse handled the issue of meaning in linguistics. However, it seems auspicious to indicate that those theories of discourse might be relevant either to structural linguistics or to various theories of discourse analysis or to what is called enunciation within the French scholarship. Hence, most precisely, the theories of discourse to be scrutinized are Gustave Guillaume's psychomechanics, Bernard Pottier's Theory, Oswald Ducrot's theory of Pragmatic Semantics.

3.1. Perceiving the Guillaumean Signifier as a Foreshadow of Discourse Semantics

Just the way Saussure's views on the linguistic sign paved the way for lexical semantics so did Gustave Guillaume's approach to the concept of signifier favored the advent of discourse semantics. However, it should genuinely be recalled that Guillaume and Saussure's respective approaches to the signifier seem to be fundamentally different as shown in the table below:

Tableau 3. Guillaume and Saussure's comparative perception of the sign and the signifier

	Saussure		Guillaume
SIGN	Signifier (acoustic image) → Signified (concept)	SIGNIFIER	Sign (physism) → Signified (psychism)

From that point on, Guillaume posited a new principle, that is, any signifier, made up with a sign and a signified, is manifested under two states of existence. Thus, a signifier is first of all in the state of language as a potential which is referred to as *tongue in psychomechanics* (virtual state) and then comes the signifier as actual, that is what it actually is in discourse. Thus, a signified as a potential is likely to yield various signifieds as actual which, in a contextual setting, might yield diverse speech effects which might even be contradictory. But whatever their difference, those different speech effects are likely to converge towards a single signified as a potential which appears as their common invariant.

Ex: What are you drinking? (Qu'est-ce que vous buvez ?)

This utterance might convey different meanings which might apparently be interpreted as being even contradictory in discourse. The utterance might first of all suppose that the person one is asking a question to is drinking something which would imply that the person asking the question is enquiring about the nature of the beverage of the other party. Secondly, the utterance can also mean that the speaker is inviting the other party to figure out what they intend or desire to drink. Thus, for Gustave Guillaume, the role of the linguist consists in deciphering, through the different speech effects, the potential signified which is the core value which underlies the various speech effects aforementioned.

3.2. Bernard Pottier's General Semantics

When developing his theory, Pottier was heavily and extensively influenced by Gustave Guillaume's psychomechanics. His theory seems particularly comprehensive in the sense that it encompasses structuralism, generative grammar and enunciation, in addition to Guillaume's psychomechanics. It is actually a holistic theory which generates different phenomena, various levels of production/interpretation in natural languages. The discourse level of his theory is related to linguistic and conceptual operations which get more and more abstract as they are displayed. Reflection within the theory is characterized by a permanent back and forth movement in-between theoretical abstraction, analysis of languages and discourse/texts. This is why on searching for abstract representations of a universal type through semasiology and onomasiology, Bernard Pottier ponders over meaning issues and he studies their linguistic and textual manifestations as stated below.

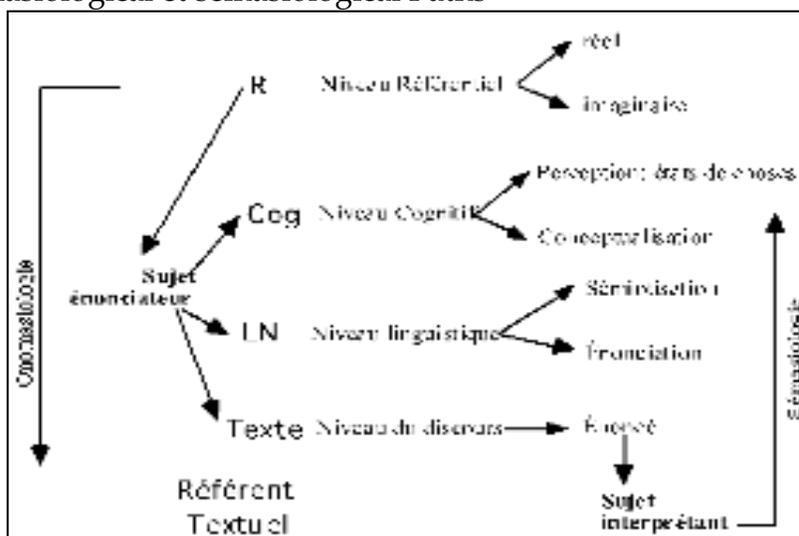
[...] Le modèle présenté par Pottier s'articule en quatre niveaux : le référentiel, le conceptuel, la langue et le discours. Ces quatre niveaux peuvent être parcourus dans les deux sens :

onomasiologique (du concept à son expression) et sémasiologique (de l'expression au concept).

[...] Le référentiel est la présomption d'existence d'un déclencheur réel physique ou imaginaire qui produit des sensations. Au niveau conceptuel ont lieu la perception et la conceptualisation. Au niveau linguistique ou de la langue ont lieu les opérations d'exploitation d'un système de signes ou d'un système de systèmes comme la langue, c'est-à-dire l'usage de tous les moyens fournis par une langue donnée et que le sujet possède en puissance. Au niveau du discours, c'est l'actualisation des virtualités de la langue qui deviennent du dit. Le discours, résultat observable et aboutissement de la mise en chaîne, devient base de départ pour l'interprétant. (El Zaïm, 1994 : 18-19)

Thus, the way the four levels are traced back onomasiologically and semasiologically has been summarized by El Zaim (1994 p.24) as shown below,

Tableau 4. Onomasiological et semasiological Paths



It was therefore thanks to Pottier's theory that discourse semantics, also referred to as enunciative semantics, reached its highest level of systematization. However, to be more comprehensive and be perceived as a whole, discourse has to be open to pragmatics. This is how Ducrot's theory of pragmatics comes in to explore and analyze unexplored sides of linguistic meaning.

3.3. The Study of meaning according to Ducrot

Ducrot's approach to the study of meaning seems rather closer to the type of semantics advocated by the French theories of enunciation. However, the whole fabric of Ducrot's semantics basically derives from the philosophy of language. As such, Ducrot's pragmatic semantics is made up with two components which work together to produce

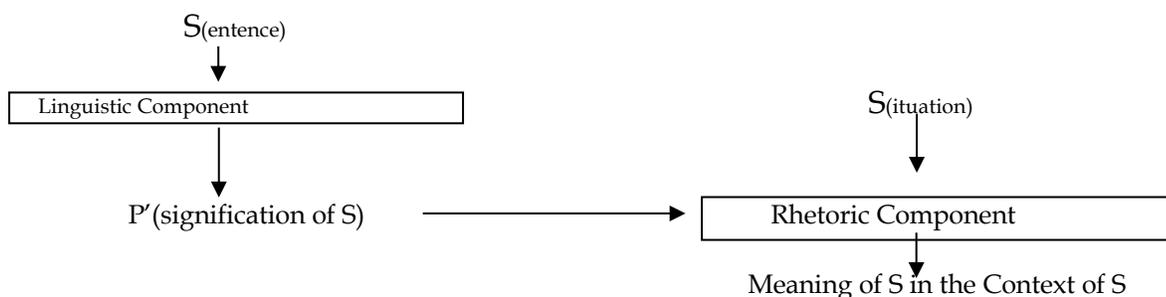
meaning. Those two components are respectively referred to as the *linguistic component* (LC) on the one hand and the *rhetorical component* (RC) on the other hand. The linguistic component (LC) fulfills two main functions. It first of all figures out the logico-grammatical construction of the sentence, in other words, it ensures if it complies with the syntax and semantics of the language under consideration. Further to that, the linguistic component assigns meaning to the sentence. That meaning assignment activity is made possible through an “external hypothesis” in the sense that the linguistic component processes linguistic units taken out of context like the example below borrowed from the French language.

P² : *Il fait chaud.*

As for the Rhetorical Component, it broadly deals with the contextual interpretation of the sentence. This entails that the activity of the Rhetorical Component is based on an “internal hypothesis” on seeing that at that stage, the meaning production machinery has to take into account the situation of enunciation (SE) which is the only instance capable of conferring the status of utterance on its own right upon a sentence by assigning meaning to it. The Rhetorical Component operates on two levels. It first of all saturates the variables which are namely indexicals (personal markers, spacio-temporal markers) so as to figure out what they refer to. Then, it proceeds with a possible application of discourse laws likely to ensure the acceptability of the final utterance produced as shown by the example below taken from the French language:

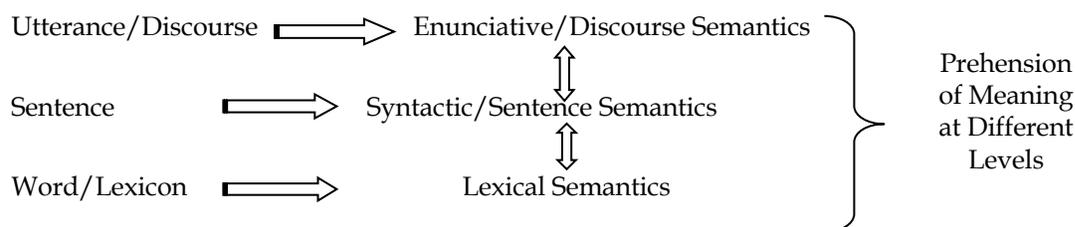
E : « *Il fait chaud.* »

That way of doing the math about semantics is said to be instructionist in the sense that it draws a lot on the internal hypothesis as shown in the figure below:



By the end of this cursory review of the debate on the concept of meaning, the following figure can be drawn to round up the evolution of that reflection as shown below:

² P here stands for sentence.



CONCLUSION

On the whole, it appears that in spite of the reluctance towards it and the debates it has raised throughout the years in the history of the science of human language, the study of meaning has finally and paradoxically turned into an unequivocal component or sub-discipline of general linguistics. So, the final objective of this study, which consisted in appraising the process by means of which the systematization of the study of linguistic meaning was made possible, resulted in the formation of a new science termed semantics.

Thus, triggered to some extent by the concept of the linguistic sign coined by Saussure, on the one hand, and inspired by the componential analysis borrowed from phonology, on the other hand, semantics initially aimed at accounting for the meaning of lexical units, hence the advent of lexical semantics. However, semantics did not confine itself to the study of lexical units only but it rather opened itself to linguistic units broader and beyond the lexicon to embrace the study of the overall meaning conveyed by sentences; hence the emergence of the semantics of sentences. Then, semantics went its way on so as to take into account the action of the speaker as the builder of the construction and reconstruction of meaning in discourse. Hence the advent of discourse semantics which seems the most comprehensive approach to the study of meaning. Finally, we can keep in mind that even though this study operates with various linguistic theories specifically relevant to semantics, it is far from claiming that it has covered the whole of semantics recognized today as a branch of general linguistics. Otherwise, this study would have been extended to many other most recent approaches to the analysis of linguistic meaning. Those approaches would have included, without being limited to them, the semantic aspects of Michaël Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and Igor Mel'čuk's Meaning-Text Theory.

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