

Sonderdruck aus

Corpora and the History of English

Papers Dedicated to
MANFRED MARKUS
on the Occasion
of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday

Edited by
CHRISTIAN MAIR
REINHARD HEUBERGER
in Collaboration with
JOSEF WALLMANNBERGER

Universitätsverlag
WINTER
Heidelberg
2006

Manfred Kienpointner

1. Introduction: semantic theory and lexical fields

In this article, I would like to sketch the present-day meaning and recent semantic history of English emotion terms within the semantic micro-field "love-hate-anger".¹ The empirical data have been taken from approximately 1700 to 2000. This is the fourth period in the historical development of English, according to its division into Old English (450-1100), Middle English (1100-1500), Early Modern English (1500-1700) and Modern English (1700ff.; cf. Hughes 2000: 12ff.; Görlach 2002: 17).

As far as the theoretical framework is concerned, I wish to follow lexical field theory as developed by Coseriu and Geckeler (1981), whose approach I still consider to be the most elaborate within structural semantics. However, I will also take into account related approaches (e.g. Greimas 1966, Lyons 1977, Pottier 1992, Lehrer 1998) and other recent developments within semantic theory. Here especially Wierzbicka's "Natural Semantic Metalanguage" (cf. Wierzbicka 1985, 1999, Goddard 2004) and the cognitive approach developed by Lakoff, Johnson and Kövecses (cf. Lakoff 1987, Lakoff/Johnson 1980, Kövecses 2002) deserve to be mentioned. These frameworks will be critically discussed and a number of conclusions will be drawn concerning the solution of central problems of structural semantics. Among these vexed problems are the demarcation of semantic fields, the distinction between core meaning and contextual meaning and the problem of choosing between differing formats of meta-linguistic language.

The resulting theoretical insights will be used to establish a selection of more than 100 nouns and verbs for further examination (section 2). Within the limits of this paper, of course, they cannot be described in detail. But I wish to deal with the semantic properties of at least some central units of the micro-field "love-hate-anger" and to make some suggestions for the description of other words and give the overall semantic structure of the field. This description will refer to both the present meaning(s) of lexical items and the diachronic changes which the micro-field has undergone. With the help of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED; second edition on CD-ROM²) and other corpus-based dictionaries of contemporary English, for example, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (LDOCE 2003) or the Collins COBUILD English Dictionary (COBUILD 1987), the semantic development within the last three centuries

¹ Micro-fields such as "love-anger-hate" are subsections of larger lexical fields ("macro-fields") such as "emotions". A lexical field is here defined as a paradigm of lexical items which together divide a semantic zone into structural units, which are opposed to each other by the presence or absence of semantic features (cf. Coseriu 1967: 294).

² I would like to thank my colleague Reinhard Heuberger, English Department, Univ. of Innsbruck, for generous and highly valuable help with the use of this CD-ROM. For information about the current usage of English emotion terms I would like to thank my colleague Leona Cordero, English Department, Univ. of Innsbruck.

will be outlined. Finally, in section 3, a few remarks will be made which go beyond the 'classical' approaches of structural semantics.

One of the most difficult theoretical problems of lexical field theory concerns the number of lexical items within a field. How many English nouns and verbs belong to the micro-field "love-hate-anger"? This seemingly simple question does not have a clear-cut answer, because the lexicon of a language is a highly heterogeneous set of words.³ Therefore, words cannot be included in or excluded from a lexical field according to some easily applied algorithm. Coseriu's answer is that in order to arrive at a "homogeneous object of investigation" (Coseriu/ Geckeler 1981: 47), a set of seven methodological distinctions has to be made within lexical field description:

1. the distinction between extralinguistic reality (objects) and language (words),
2. the distinction between language (primary language) and meta-language,
3. the distinction between synchrony and diachrony,
4. the distinction between technique of discourse and repeated discourse
5. the distinction between architecture of language and structure of language
6. the distinction between type, system, norm and discourse
7. the distinction between signification (meaning) and designation (reference).

Among these, the first distinction is possibly the most difficult but at the same time the most indispensable one. We have to distinguish between scientific terminology and popular nomenclatures of plants, animals and artefacts, which are based on extralinguistic reality and (scientific or popular) knowledge about reality, and structures of language, which are based on knowledge about language (cf. Coseriu 1973: 26ff., Lyons 1977: 1 287ff.). Words with a meaning which is unknown by non-expert speakers of a natural language have to be excluded. As far as the micro-field of "love, hate and anger" is concerned, lexical items from the fields of philosophy, political science, psychoanalysis or psychopathology such as *agape*, *altruism*, *caritas*, *eros*, *libido*, *masochism*, *narcissism*, *necrophilia*, *misanthropy*, *philanthropy*, *sadism*, *xenophobia*, *zoophilia* would seem to be candidates for exclusion on this criterion (cf. also the long list of *phobias* in Roget 1992: 101ff.). However, some of them, for example, *altruism* (according to the OED coined as *altruisme* by the French philosopher Auguste Comte 1851, and subsequently introduced into English), have become part of everyday language to a degree which warrants their inclusion in the field – and requires an analysis of where precisely the distinction is between the use of this word as part of an expert terminological taxonomy and as part of the vocabulary of everyday English.

The first distinction is also important because of the frequent lack of clear-cut boundaries between certain entities in the real world (e.g. cups and mugs, night and day, green and blue, shades of emotions such as irritation, annoyance, anger, fury or rage). Within prototype semantics, this has led some scholars to the (hasty) conclusion that there are only fuzzy borders between the meanings of, say, *cup* or *mug*, *night* and *day*, *green* and *blue*, or *irritation*, *anger* or *fury*. But we have to distinguish between the fuzziness of reference, that is, the highly frequent existence of fuzzy borders in reality, and the structure of language, where clear semantic oppositions exist between *cup* and *mug* etc. (cf. Wierzbicka 1985; Kleiber 1993: 107f.). We can seriously disagree about

the reference of terms, for example, whether someone is indeed annoyed or angry. However, at the same time we can perfectly agree on the meaning of *annoyed*, *angry* (cf. Coseriu/ Geckeler 1981: 49).

The importance of the first distinction does not preclude a comparison of the historical development of everyday language and the parallel development of scientific terminologies. For instance, it is interesting to note that many of the technical terms quoted above were introduced into English at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century. Examples include *libido* (1909), *masochism* (1893), *necrophilia* (1892), *sadism* (1888) (cf. the OED and Hughes 2000: 385). This comparative historical analysis, however, is the second step – to be taken after the first distinction has been determined.

The second distinction excludes meta-linguistic usages of lexical items. In this way, pseudo-problems such as the meaning of *love* within paradoxical inferences of the type *All you need is "love"*. *Therefore, all you need is a word with four letters* can be avoided. Ultimately, meta-linguistic usage "does not include any semantic structuring, for we are here concerned with an unlimited nomenclature in which every element stands in contrast to every other element" (Coseriu/ Geckeler 1981: 50).

The third distinction (synchrony vs diachrony), made famous by Ferdinand de Saussure (1968: 140), is especially important in the present paper. It would make absolutely no sense to deal with the meaning of English emotion terms regardless of the changes that the semantic micro-field of "love, hate and anger" has undergone from 1700 up to the present day. Specific (metaphorical) senses⁴ of lexical items have been newly created, other senses of words have disappeared, and even entire words have become obsolete or have been introduced into the language.

For example, *amour*, a French loanword which until the 18th century had been used as a synonym for *love*, was later restricted to the current meaning "a (secret or illicit) love-affair". The semantic shift of the phrase *to make love* towards the sense "to copulate" took place during the 19th century. Hughes (2000: 45) comments that "[u]ntil the early part of this century [= the 20th c.] *to make love* meant roughly the same as 'to flirt'." The lexical item *rese* ("a rush, run") had the metaphorical sense "hot temper, anger" until the beginning of the 15th century, but does not exist in Modern English (cf. OED). Moreover, changes of the meaning of a word have repercussions for the meaning of its 'field-neighbours' and, ultimately, for the whole lexical field (cf. Coseriu 1964; Lehrer 1998).

Coseriu and Geckeler (1981: 51) make clear that this distinction is a purely methodological one: You cannot describe the meaning of words without distinguishing synchrony and diachrony. However, unlike Saussure's (1968: 30) rather static view of the synchronic system of a language, Coseriu favours a perspective where the system is undergoing perpetual movement. In this view, the speakers of a language (re-)create the system dynamically, in an ever ongoing goal-orientated process, though ordinary speakers do not do this consciously and most of time re-create the language in very much the same way. In this way, language is constantly being created through change:

³ "Words" are here understood as "lexical morphemes" (or "lexemes", "lexical items"), that is, "the units functioning within a lexical field" (cf. Coseriu/ Geckeler 1981: 57).

⁴ "Sense" is here understood as one of the several meanings which a word can have. These can be purely contextual meanings or conventionalized meanings of polysynonymous words.

