

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.

