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experiment, the rôle of the NP had to be decided without the information provided by the verb, on the bases of the form, position and semantics of the NP only. It is highly improbable that the role of the sentence-initial NP for instance is decided at such an early stage. But when exactly it is decided is a question for further research. And finally, we should remember that human beings use information in a flexible way, depending on the demands of the task (e.g. Flores d'Arce 1982).

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Accounting for Usage in Ambiguous Sentences

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The first point I wish to make is the obvious but often forgotten fact that a speaker uses a word for the meaning it can express. In a well known article Robin Lakoff (1969) recalled the fact that in identical contexts (e.g. *Do you want some beans?/ Do you want any beans?*) *some* and *any* give rise to different sentence meanings. She argued from this fact to show that usage is prompted, not by something in the context, but rather by the meaning each determiner can express. That is to say, she maintained that the principle of differentiation distinguishing one sentence from the other must lie in what distinguishes the meaning of one word from the other and so "there can't be any *some/any* rule". Only by assuming that the two words have the potential for expressing different formal meanings can one account for the fact that such minimal pair sentences do not mean the same thing.

This type of argumentation which, so far as I know, is generally accepted, can throw light on ambiguous sentences like the well-known (cf. Seppänen 1984) *She wants to marry a millionaire*. The difference between an ambiguous sentence of this type and minimal pair sentences, of course, is that although we again get two different sentence meanings there is no apparent variation in the sentence, no change of words or form. Here, the reader or listener has no way of discerning whether the speaker has in mind a specific individual or the set of available millionaires among whom the subject hopes some day to make her choice.

To account for different meanings when there is visibly no corresponding change in the means of signifying meaning poses a problem. In fact an ambiguous sentence would appear to give counter-evidence to the position of Lakoff just evoked, namely that different sentence meanings can be traced back to different word meanings: the principle of differentiation would seem to lie elsewhere. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that any⁶ appeal to context to explain the differences of meaning is excluded because, by definition in ambiguous sentences like the above, context is identical for both interpretations. The only alternative would seem to be that of proposing two indefinite articles — two homonyms — one for each interpretation, but this alternative does not explain anything and ultimately would make communication impossible. This then is the problem: how to account for a difference of meaning when there is no difference in the visible or audible signs expressing those meanings, when in fact the principle of differentiation must lie, not in what differentiates two contexts, nor in what differentiates two words, but in what, within a single word, differentiates two of its meanings.

It has often been pointed out that the ambiguity in our example arises from interpreting the article in either its "specific" or its "non-specific" sense. Clearly here the indefinite article has the possibility of expressing two quantitatively different senses — a particular individual and a set of individuals (with the prospect of one of them being singled out). Moreover we know from other uses (cf. Seppänen 1984) that the article can also have a "generic" or "universal" sense when it evokes all the individuals that can be designated by the substantive. This brings our problem into focus: what is there in the make-up of the indefinite article that permits it to express now one sense, now another quantitatively different one, and this even in identical contexts? A first element of solution to this problem was provided nearly half a century ago by Gustave Guillaume.

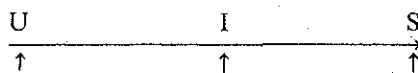
Adopting the same common sense point of view as that noted above, Guillaume assumed that we use a word for the meaning it can express. Confronted with the fact that the article *can* express several meanings in discourse, he was led to postulate a MEANING POTENTIAL for it, a prior capacity or resource that the speaker can somehow call on and actualize when he or she wishes to express one or the other senses. In thus postulating a potential meaning for a word like the article *a*, Guillaume provided a basis for explaining its diverse senses since a potential can give rise to diverse actualizations (and to this respect differs from the notion of cause as it is commonly understood). Such a postulate fitted in well with the Saussurean concept of language as "langue", as a systematic whole acquired by the individual (which will be designated here by the English term "tongue"). On the other hand some linguists greeted this postulate with considerable suspicion since the potential meaning as such can never be observed directly: all that appears in discourse is what is derived from it — the different senses in context. As a consequence, the existence of the potential meaning can be established only by reasoning back from observed senses (in essentially the same way we can establish the nature of a phoneme or, as Valin 1964 shows, the existence of a reconstructed form in comparative grammar).

Granted this postulate of a potential meaning, one has a basis for reflecting on the nature of the conditions permitting a word to express several senses in discourse and in particular to give rise to an ambiguous sentence. A first step was made in this direction when Guillaume (1929) clarified the relation between different forms of the

same paradigm by proposing that they arise one after the other during a single mental operation; for example, he argued that the characteristic meanings of the three moods of the French verb arise at three successive moments in the mental process of representing time inherent in any verb. He further argued that what actually constitutes the system in tongue underlying the paradigm is this subconscious process or operation: the mental program acquired with the mother tongue and permanently at the speaker's disposal. He later appealed to the same operative principle to explain the relation between forms — between the meanings of forms — in the paradigm of number in the substantive, in the paradigm of the articles and elsewhere, thereby showing that the meaning of a given form is generated early or late in the particular thought process constituting that system in tongue. In fact it is now possible to demonstrate that the difference of meaning between *some* and *any* brought out in the Lakoff article is the result of *any* arising before *some* in the operational program underlying the paradigm.

This view of the forms of a paradigm being the products of an underlying mental operation provides a principle of considerable heuristic value in analyzing the various systems of a language. It does not, however, answer our question of how a single word or form can express different senses, and this even in identical contexts. In 1941 (cf. Guillaume 1984, Introduction) Guillaume postulated a similar principle for single words; that is, he proposed not only that the two articles of French arose from the same mental operation intercepted at different moments — *un* before *le* — but that *un* itself is THE SIGN OF A MOVEMENT and that its different observable senses in discourse are the result of intercepting this movement early or late in its development. This idea was quite novel, revolutionary even, because in fact it postulated a generative process for producing the meaning of a single word, any word, and so implies that any observed meaning must be analyzed and explained in terms of the operation of thought that produced it. Of more immediate interest here, however, is the fact that Guillaume's operational postulate, which has provided a basis for analyzing the articles in English (cf. Hewson 1972), can also explain the polysemy of the indefinite article and thus account for our ambiguous sentence.

As already mentioned, various scholars have pointed out that the indefinite article expresses sometimes a "generic" or "universal" sense, sometimes a "non-specific" sense, sometimes a "specific" or "singular" sense. That is to say, the article evokes the extent of reference of its substantive in the sentence being constructed. Since the extent of references, or EXTENSITY, of any substantive can vary from sentence to sentence, the potential meaning of the article must be such as to be able to embrace all possible variations, from the greatest possible (= universal) to the smallest possible (= singular) extensity. The movement postulated for *a* is therefore one from maximum to minimum in the field of extensity. Intercepted at its initial instant, this movement delivers the representation of a maximum extensity, a universal; intercepted at its final instant it gives the representation of a minimal extensity, a singular; intercepted at any instant between these two extremes, it will produce the representation of some intermediate extensity. All possible variations are thus provided for by postulating this movement as the potential meaning of the indefinite article. This can be represented schematically by means of a vector to suggest the mental operation with the three possible of interception — beginning, middle and end — giving rise to the three observed senses of the article ("Universal", "Intermediate", "Singular"), as follows:



U = Universal (generic); I = Intermediate (Non-specific); S = Singular (= specific)

We are now in a position to examine our sentence. What brings about the ambiguity is the fact that the listener is not given enough clues to discern at which point the speaker has intercepted the movement of *a*. That is, lacking sufficient context or knowledge of the situation, we interpret the referent of the noun phrase as either a single individual, the article evoking a minimal extensity, or as a set of individuals from which one is to be chosen, the article in this case evoking an intermediate extensity. Notice here that the ambiguity arises for the listener, not for the speaker, who, in view of the experience he has in mind, has opted for the one or the other sense since he obviously cannot generate — cannot think — both “one” and “more than one” at the same time. In this way, we can account for the two possible interpretations of the sentence as the effects of two different actualizations of the underlying or potential meaning of the article and are not obliged to report to such expedients as inventing homonyms or trying to find some difference in identical contexts. (What is being proposed here might be compared with the manner in which a phoneme may be actualized by means of two different allophones.)

This principle of a potential meaning which is operative by nature is general enough to provide a basis for investigating most any problem of ambiguity arising from polysemy within the word (cf. Fuchs 1986 for some aspects of the question requiring further examination). But it goes far beyond this in providing a framework within which the related problem of indeterminacy (cf. Coates 1983: 9ff.) or sense-spectra (cf. Cruse 1986: 71ff.) finds its place as a predicable phenomenon. For example, commenting on the meanings of the modal auxiliaries in English, Palmer remarks (1979: 172—173) that “there are often continua with extremes that are clearly distinct, but with considerable indeterminacy in the middle”. This remark depicts exactly the situation one would expect if, in fact, Guillaume’s postulate corresponded to the reality of how meaning is actually represented in the mind, if, that is, each form of a paradigm is stored as one operation in a mental program ready to be activated at the moment of need.

It is time to conclude. Once accepted, this postulate of a subconscious mental process capable of producing the various senses of a word observed in discourse provides a principle of differentiation within the word. As a consequence this type of ambiguous sentence is no longer seen as a difficult and embarrassing problem but rather as a precious bit of data indicative of two different instants in the hidden operation of thought that one is trying to reconstruct. As for the postulate itself, far from appearing implausible, it would seem to be necessary since one can hardly conceive of a product of the human mind without some mental process, some psychomechanism, having produced it.

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Which Depth do we Need in Semantics?

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The present period of the development of linguistics is also characterized by an increasing gap between the linguistic theory as pursued by scholars and research institutions, and linguistic practice, oriented towards the public and realized in classes, textbooks and comprehensive grammars. In order to make the best of the recent upshots of the theory, it is an urgent task to achieve an agreement on some lucid concepts and operative descriptive approaches. In this paper one problem of the presentation of the semantic component in syntax is briefly discussed.

It may be instructive — with respect to this goal — to draw a parallel between syntactic and lexical meanings. Let us consider the following comparison. Many nouns denote "objects"; if a noun is conceived as a potential unit of the language system, it can be correctly used for any element of the class of objects defined by certain properties corresponding to the components comprised in the semantic structure of that noun. These components constitute the cognitive (denotative) meaning of nouns. Due to the identity of cognitive meanings, a noun may be ranked with other nouns as their synonym. Complete synonymy, however, does not occur; it is in fact precluded because of the economy of language. The options and preferences made among synonyms by the speakers can be described chiefly in terms of stylistic oppositions (like standard : literary : colloquial : vernacular, domestic : borrowed, obsolete : new etc.). These features are considered connotative components of the meaning.

Similarly a sentence can be conceived as a potential unit of language denoting a class of situations (events, states of affairs). Two sentences are synonymous if they can be correctly used, i.e. if they are true about the same (type of) situation. The options made between them can also be interpreted in terms of stylistic oppositions (cf. the preference of co-ordination in spoken discourses, of nominalizations in professional texts etc.). But the interpretation of many other options would deserve an inconvenient extension of the concept "style". That is why they must be treated in some other way.

First of all, it is not quite clear what is the position of respective preferences within the concepts of cognitive:connotative meaning. There is e.g. no consent about the option between active and passive constructions. Some scholars eliminate it from the options among synonyms (cf. Daneš 1985, p. 30). Quirk (1972) seems to put the difference on the level of form when saying "... although the structure of a sentence changes under voice transformation, its meaning remains the same" (p. 802); he admits, however, that the voice "makes it possible to view the action in two ways, without change in the facts reported" (p. 801). Does it mean that the "facts reported" are identified with the