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THE WORD - WHY?[1]

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> ... le mot, malgré la difficulté
> qu'on a à le définir, est une unité
> qui s'impose à l'esprit, quelque
> chose de central dans le
> mécanisme de la langue ...[2]
> Ferdinand de Saussure

1. THE TRADITION

Saussure's remark may at first sight seem to be one of those commonplaces which any layman who has thought the least bit about language might make but which will not stand up to closer observation and analysis. However, coming from Saussure, the remark is perhaps worth more than a passing glance. Indeed, a few moments' reflexion suffices to bring out that, if it is not a gross exaggeration, it entails that the word must be a universal of human language because it is depicted as a central part in the mechanism of the tongue[3] one is speaking. As such, the word must come into play every time one speaks since one cannot envisage the functioning of any mechanism, be it physical or mental, if a key part is missing. It would, therefore, be a universal not just in the sense that it can be observed in a large number of languages or even in all languages, but in a much more comprehensive sense: it must be found in every act, every manifestation of language. Granted the extraordinary diversity of human languages and the infinite variety of situations prompting people to speak, this omnipresence of the word would, assuming that Saussure's remark reflects the reality of language, constitute a very remarkable fact.

Saussure, of course, is not the only scholar to endorse this view. Early in the nineteenth century, von Humboldt had written:

> By *words* we understand the signs of particular concepts. The syllable represents a unity of sound; but it becomes a word only if it acquires significance on its own, which often involves a combination of several. In a word, therefore, a dual unity, of *sound* and *concept*, comes together. Words thereby become the true *elements* of *speech*, since syllables, with their lack of significance, cannot properly be so called. If we picture language as a second world, that man has objectified out of himself from the impressions he receives from the true one, then words are the sole objects therein for which the character of individuality must be retained, even in form. (Humboldt 1988:70; italics in the original)

He then goes on to affirm that word-constructing (*Wortbildung*) "is an essential requirement for speaking". Although sometimes romantic-sounding in style, much of his well known essay is concerned with the problem posed by the word. In the present century, the importance of the word was stressed by Vygotsky at the end of his essay "Thought and Word" (1962:153):

> We cannot close our survey without mentioning the perspectives that our investigation opens up. We studied the inward aspects of speech, which were

as unknown to science as the other side of the moon. We showed that a generalized reflection of reality is the basic characteristic of words. This aspect of the word brings us to the threshold of a wider and deeper subject — the general problem of consciousness. Thought and language, which reflect reality in a way different from that of perception, are the key to the nature of human consciousness. Words play a central part not only in the development of thought but in the historical growth of consciousness as a whole. A word is a microcosm of human consciousness.

In the more prosaic tradition of linguists, Bühler considers words and sentences "the structures of language" (1990:81), and their duality as perhaps "its most characteristic structural law" (p.87). Gardiner (1951:88) has given the most succinct expression to this view: *"The sentence is the unit of speech, and the word is the unit of language"* (the original in italics), words being "the most important constituents of language". In the American tradition, perhaps the best known argument in favor of the importance of the word is Sapir's (1949:24ff), particularly when he describes his experience with young speakers of Nootka, claiming (p.33) the word to be "a psychological reality", "the existent unit of living speech". The most recent plea comes from Miller (1991:261): "...words — the fundamental units of language."

This, then, is a well established tradition. It implies that human language cannot exist without the word, a view which, if valid, entails not only that an analysis of language failing to take it into account will be at best incomplete but that any approach aiming at a general theory of language must accord the word a central place. Such is not the case, however, in many contemporary theories; few theories attribute to the word a truly central position in language, and more than one approach either peripheralizes it or dispenses with it altogether as a linguistic entity. Thus for many linguists there has been a break with tradition, but certainly not because the tradition lacked authoritative support. It will therefore not be wasted effort to dwell for a moment on the reasons why the word suffered an eclipse earlier in the century, particularly in view of the renewed interest shown in it over the last few years.

2. THE BREAK WITH THE TRADITION

The views of the above authorities all imply that the word is a sine qua non of human language, that without the word language as we know it cannot exist. Since it would be impossible to verify a view of so general a nature by way of direct observation, the only alternative is to try to understand on what it is based. Why is the word a necessary condition of language? Posing the problem in this way suggests that the word involves something essential to language, inherent in its nature. Discerning just what this is will be crucial to understanding the break with the tradition.

The above citations give us some hints where to begin. One might, like Humboldt, look on words as the elements of discourse[4], the building blocks of meaning from which sentences are constructed. This point of view has been put forward more recently by Bolinger (1963:136), who maintains that:

... the meaning of the sentence must be discussed in terms of the meaning of the component words and traffic-rule morphemes.... word meaning has a kind of priority and to that extent is unique.

Since any sentence, any discourse is constructed in order to express meaning, such a view certainly attributes an essential role to words. And yet this argument did not prove convincing to many linguists, perhaps because describing the word simply in terms of its sentence function in this way is not completely satisfying. To be convincing it would have to go one step further and show what it is in the word that permits it to fulfil this function.

In this respect, Gardiner's remark that the word is the unit of tongue[5], whereas the sentence is the unit of discourse, offers a more complete view. As the unit of discourse the sentence is not only the "constituent and isolable member" into which discourse can be divided but also a whole in its own right grouping smaller units, the smallest being the word. Similarly, the word is both a grouping whole and the member into which tongue can somehow be divided. This in no way contradicts the view that the word is the "element" of discourse, the smallest sayable unit capable of functioning in the sentence. On the contrary, in adding the notion that a word has its own make-up and so somehow has an existence prior to, and even independent of, that of any particular sentence, this view suggests that, to find what permits the word to fulfil its function as a sayable, meaning-expressing element in the sentence, the consitituents of the word must be examined.

Many linguists have, of course, examined the word from the point of view of its physical shape in an effort to discern just what makes it a sayable element of discourse, but none of these attempts to describe this determining factor from the point of view of its phonological manifestations has proved totally satisfactory. Attempts to discern the principle of unity on the mental side of the word were not more successful. Even when wholeheartedly undertaken, the observation of meaning led, not to the unity sought, but to polysemy, as the following passages from Stern 1931 make clear. On the one hand:

There is no getting away from the fact that single words *have* more or less permanent meanings, that they actually do refer to certain referents and not to others, and that this characteristic is the indispensable basis of all communication.... It is on this basis that the speaker selects his words, and the hearer understands them. (p.85)

On the other hand:

It is further evident that when the word *camera* is used of different cameras, the meaning changes in correlation with the change of referent. The sentence *there flies a bird* has not the same meaning when used of a fluttering sparrow, of a swallow, an eagle, and so on, in a variety of circumstances. Although the words remain unaltered, the meaning changes with the change of referents. (p.40)[6]

Saussure himself, quite aware of the problem, could only propose the need to seek the basis of word unity:

Le lien entre les deux emplois du même mot ne repose ni sur l'identité matérielle, ni sur l'exacte similitude des sens, mais sur des éléments qu'il faudra rechercher et qui feront toucher de très près à la nature véritable des unités linguistiques. (p.152)[7]

The failure of such attempts to deal with polysemy at a moment when behaviorist and positivist currents of thought were prevalent led to the view that meaning cannot be. approached by competent observers in a coherent way. Indeed, without some method of analysis, it is difficult to see how meaning can be treated scientifically and so how the word can be adopted as a basis of language analysis. The fact that a word can express different senses thus raises a serious problem for anyone who would view it as a unit and describe the raison d'être of the word, its necessary condition of sayability, in terms of meaning.

The break with the tradition is thus understandable in view of the fact that no generally acceptable principle of word unity has been found. It led some to reject the word, not only as a universal but even as a reality of language: "Isolated words are in fact only linguistic figments, the products of an advanced linguistic analysis" (Malinowski 1935:11). More widespread, however, has been the attitude of those who "take the word for granted" (Cf. Guzman and O'Grady 1987:128), an attitude which may arise in part because we tend to overlook what is

omnipresent. Nevertheless, it remains that a scientific discipline cannot afford to take for granted any part of its object of study, let alone one that is present in every observation. Besides, if the word really does "impose itself on the mind" as Saussure claims, there must be some reason for it. If it is "something central in the mechanism of tongue" it must have some specific function to fulfil. If the word really is the unit of tongue, there must be some principle of unity, some criterion guiding the speaker. In short, until some compelling reason for the word's fundamental importance is made explicit, such pronouncements as Saussure's may well be accepted on the authority of the scholar who makes them, but one can understand those who abandon the tradition.

This, then, is the problem I wish to pose: if the word is a necessary condition for language as we know it, what is the reason for this? As one contemporary scholar puts it:

> What is at issue in a scientific discussion of words is not so much specific words as wordiness: why are all languages wordy? Why are words a universal design feature of languages? It is words in general, not scientific words, that are scientifically important. (Miller 1991:5)

In what follows, I wish to present one attempt to deal with this problem, that of Gustave Guillaume, who is, to my knowledge, the only linguist who has attempted to develop a general theory of language, The Psychomechanics of Language, based on the raison d'être of the word.

3. GUILLAUME AND THE TRADITION

As a sayable element of discourse to serve in building a sentence, a word for Guillaume consists of a meaning and its physical sign. Its inherent unity resides not in the physical component but in the mental component because the word is primarily a meaning construct.[8] Furthermore, a given word is not a ready-made unit, like a sandwich in a machine, to be deposited as such in the sentence one is putting together. Rather, like Humboldt, Guillaume maintains that each time a word is required, it has to be constructed, reconstructed, along certain architectural lines, from a set of pre-established formative elements. And so from a very general point of view, Guillaume considers the word in any language as essentially a "constructional mechanism" (1984:109) permitting speakers to produce the linguistic units that emerge into consciousness — the observable elements of a sentence.

Considering the word a constructional mechanism in this way, however, does not explain its universality. To understand why this mechanism is called on every time one engages in an act of language, it suffices to consider that whenever we speak, we speak about what we have in mind, about some experience. In fact it is inconceivable that one could speak about anything else, about something of which one is quite unaware. The particular experience may, of course, be the outcome of perceiving, of imagining, of remembering, of understanding something someone has said or written, etc., but whatever its source, our experience is personal. "One man's idea is not that of another", as Frege remarked, emphasizing thereby the strictly private nature of the experience constituting anyone's state of consciousness at a given moment. As such, then, our momentary experience is unsayable and yet it is the only thing we can talk about. Hence the necessity to translate it into some medium accessible to others, to present it again to the mind in another form, to re-present it linguistically with whatever means our language makes available to us. The speaker must represent the experience he has in mind by means of sayable meaning-units called words to be combined into a sentence or sentences, thereby reconstituting an analogue of his experience. That is, the meaning expressed by a sentence, or a set of sentences constituting a discourse, is a linguistic reconstitution of an experience which in

itself is unsayable. And this meaning can be expressed only if it has first been represented by words.

The human principle underlying language is that expression is possible only if something has first been represented. The necessity of representing something before expressing it is universal in space and time. (Guillaume 1984:94-95)

It is this which makes the word a necessity in every act of language: we cannot speak unless we have something to say, and we cannot have something sayable unless we represent the experience we have in mind by means of vocable units of meaning ready to form part of a sentence.

This, then, is Guillaume's postulate: words are the means of representing experience through language. This explains why, as Saussure maintains, the word is "central in the mechanism of tongue": without representation by means of words, we could express nothing linguistically and, in fact, language as we know it would cease to exist. Moreover, being the unit that emerges into consciousness, it "imposes itself on the mind". As such, the word is seen by the speaker to be, in Sapir's terms, "a psychological reality", "the existent unit of living speech". Indeed, this postulate is implicit in Vygotsky's view that words "reflect reality in a way different from that of perception" and in Humboldt's view of tongue "as a second world that man has objectified out of himself from the impressions he receives from the true one". This also gives content to Gardiner's view of the word as the "unit of language" (= tongue) in the sense that inherent in each word is a constructional mechanism, a little preconscious program (to borrow a metaphor from the computer) for representing some aspect or type of experience. That is, tongue is a complex mechanism of representation, a series of operational possibilities organized systematically for producing units of meaning that represent experience. Thus it can be seen that by postulating the word as a mechanism of representation Guillaume continues and summarizes a certain tradition by giving a reason for the universality of the word. On the other hand, this postulate brings with it an implication with far-reaching consequences, namely that the various forms and uses of words are meaning motivated.

All this no doubt strikes many linguists as a sort of wishful thinking which has little to do with the hard reality of actual language and the uncompromising demands of scientific analysis. They may well concede that the word is necessary for an act of language and even allow that it provides the means for representing experience, but when it is spoken of in terms of a mechanism for representing experience in units of meaning, this amounts to basing not only language theory but language itself on something intangible, something mental. After all there is no way of observing a mental or "psycho-" mechanism since it is, by definition, preconscious. In short, without some means of analyzing the hidden system of the word, this tradition may well remain a splendid vision, but it cannot be translated into anything of scientific worth. Thus the whole issue comes down to one crucial problem: how to analyze the system of the word in any language, its representational mechanism.

4. A METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Confronted with the words in a language like English, the linguist appears to be in a position not unlike that of other scientists, if one can judge from the following well known passage concerning physics:

> Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. In our endeavor to understand reality we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. He sees the face and the moving hands, even hears its ticking, but he has no way of opening the case. If he is ingenious he may form some picture of a mechanism which could be responsible for all the

things he observes but he may never be quite sure his picture is the only one which could explain his observations. (Einstein and Infeld 1966:31)

The attempt to "form some picture" of a word's mechanism of representation which would help explain all its uses, "all the things he observes", calls for some basic parameter with reference to which the elements resulting from analysis can be grouped coherently. Only in this way can an explanation of the word as a functional unit be worked out.

The basic parameter for all Guillaume's analyses is a very simple one: time. The operations made possible by any mechanism require time, operative time, to take place, so those involved in the construction of a word must require time as well. Now the operative time required to realize the physical part of the word is perceivable and so measurable, but that required to construct the mental part of the word is not. Notwithstanding the fact that the operations of representation are so rapid as to defy perceivability, they must take time. It is this microtime of representation — as opposed to the macrotime of expression — which provides the basic parameter for the elements of analysis in serving to position them before or after one another.[9] This operative time can be diagrammed in the general form of a vector:

BEFORE | AFTER

OPERATIVE TIME

In analyzing meaning, perhaps the most obvious distinction for words in English (or in other Indo-european languages: cf. Guillaume 1984:38ff) is that they express both lexical and grammatical meaning. Interpreted in terms of a representational mechanism, this means there must be an operation of ideogenesis to provide the lexical component and an operation of morphogenesis to provide the grammatical component. Granted that these two operations constitute the two parts of a single operation of word formation, they must arise at different points in its operative time. The key question then is: which arises first? Considering that grammatical meaning is categorial by nature, that it situates in general categories the particular lexeme of a word, it follows that the lexeme must be represented first. That is, ideogenesis precedes morphogenesis in the process of word formation. In a diagram:

IDEOGENESIS | MORPHOGENESIS

WORD FORMATION

In this way, by observing a result (the grammatical categorizes the lexical) and imagining the process required to produce it, this basic distinction in representation is made in operational terms.

The grammatical component itself can often be observed to consist of several elements. That is to say, in a noun or in a verb, the operation of morphogenesis categorizes the lexeme in diverse manners, finally situating it in its most general category, the part of speech. In a noun, for example, the most obvious category is that of number, expressed by ø or by -s, to indicate that the lexeme has been represented as 'continuate' or as 'discontinuate', respectively. Again the basic parameter prompts the key question: which arises first in the process of representing number, continuate (ø) or discontinuate (-s)?[10] By far the most frequent sense of -s is that of 'plural', 'more than one', while that of ø is 'singular', 'one'. And here too an order can be postulated: to represent 'more than one', 'one' must already have been discerned. That is, in the system of number,

'singular' must arise before 'plural', continuate must precede discontinuate. In a diagram:

ø   -S
'CONTINUATE'   'DISCONTINUATE'

SYSTEM OF NUMBER
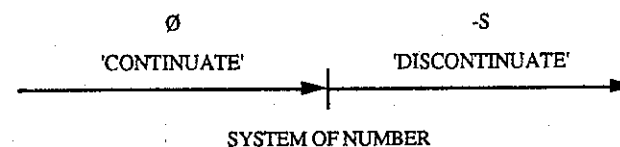
Using the same method, the analysis can be pushed to the final element, the morpheme itself. One can observe the different senses expressed by each morpheme and attempt to imagine the respective operation required to produce them. Thus it is well known that the 'continuate' morpheme can express not only a 'singular', as in *I liked the film*, but also a 'mass' sense as in *We enjoyed the music*, and even a 'generic' sense as in *Water boils at 100°*. All three senses[11] are found with certain nouns:

      1a. Beer is a fermented drink. ('generic')
      1b. Beer was served with the meal. ('mass')
      1c. A beer was left on the table. ('singular')

An extensive examination of usage has shown that this polysemy of the ø morpheme can be explained by imagining that the ø movement itself is intercepted at different points. Intercepted at its final point, this movement gives rise to the representation of a minimal quantity, a 'singular' sense, as in 1c; intercepted at its initial point, it gives rise to the representation of a maximum quantity, a 'generic' sense, as in 1a; intercepted at some intermediate point, it gives rise to the representation of some quantity neither maximum nor minimum, a 'mass' sense, as in 1b. In a diagram, where M = maximum quantity, I = intermediate quantity, and m = minimum quantity:

ø
'Continuate'
M   I   m
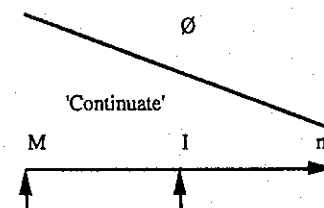
The great advantage of analyzing the different senses of a morpheme by positioning them in operative time is that it permits the reconciliation of the observed polysemy of the morpheme with the monosemy required by the needs of communication. Ø morpheme always signifies 'continuate' quantity, but the particular quantity signified varies from one use to another. That is, the unchanging meaning potential of the morpheme is the possibility of a movement through the field of 'continuate' quantity; its actual meaning, resulting from intercepting this movement at the appropriate point, is the representation of a particular quantity. In this way, polysemy, far from being an obstacle to analysis, is rather an invitation to imagine a representational operation capable of producing the observed senses.

Similar remarks can be made for the -s morpheme. Its usual 'plural' sense, as in *Cars are lined up for miles*, can be constrasted with its 'generic' sense as in *Cars pollute*. The morpheme can even be used, though far less frequently, in a 'singular' sense, as in *an outstanding opening ceremonies, a new airlines, an*

army barracks (see Wickens 1991 for many more examples). All three senses are found with certain words:

      2a. That crossroads is blocked. ('singular')
   2b. The next three crossroads have no traffic lights. ('plural')
      2c. Crossroads should be well lighted. ('generic')

Again, trying to situate these different senses at successive moments in the -s movement leads to the following picture: intercepted at its initial point, the movement gives rise to the representation of a minimal quantity, a 'singular' sense, as in 2a; intercepted at its final point, the movement gives rise to the representation of a maximium quantity, a 'generic' sense, as in 2c; intercepted at any intermediate point, it gives rise to the representation of some quantity neither minimum nor maximum, a 'plural' sense, as in 2b. In a diagram:
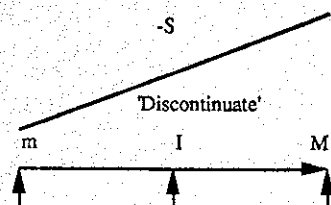
It can be seen from this diagram that the -s movement is the reverse of the Ø movement, its mirror-image, starting up where the other leaves off: at the point where a minimal quantity is represented. Together, the two form the system:
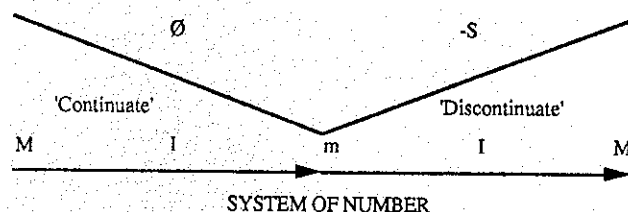

SYSTEM OF NUMBER

Conceived as a mechanism, the system of number in English can thus be seen to provide the means of representing any positive quantity imaginable for a noun lexeme. Furthermore, this mechanism is put into operation every time a noun is required or understood.

    Although number is the most clearly marked element of grammatical meaning in the noun, it is not the only one. Most observers would agree that gender is also part of its meaning and this raises the question of order: which arises first in morphogenesis, gender or number? Recent work done on gender in English (Morris 1991) provides evidence not only that gender precedes number in the series of categorizing forms in the substantive, but that it is the first such form to arise in its morphogenesis. Space does not permit even a summary discussion of what has been discerned so far in the representational mechanism involved here, nor of that involved in case, which appears to be a later form in morphogenesis leading to the most general category, the part of speech. Sketchy though it is, this outline will perhaps give some idea of the complexity of the representational mechanism called into play every time one wishes to use a noun.

    The representational nature of the lexical meaning of the word is much more obvious, granted the unlimited multiplicity of individual experiences which ordinary words like *door* or *feeling* may be called upon to represent. To accomodate this multiplicity, the potential meaning can be usefully considered as a

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sort of "viewing idea", a conceptual construct for scanning the speaker's experience and representing a certain grouping of impressions. Because of the particularity of each concept, however, its nature is much harder to analyze than the meaning of a morpheme[12]. On the other hand, this very particularity provides a clear indication that ideogenesis is an operation of particularization, a movement providing the word with what individualizes it, and as such quite the opposite of morphogenesis. Such considerations suggest that for a word in English the operation of ideogenesis is a movement of particularization and the operation of morphogenesis a movement of generalization, itself consisting of several sub-systems. The following diagram will perhaps help to picture this representational mechanism:

FORMATION OF A NOUN
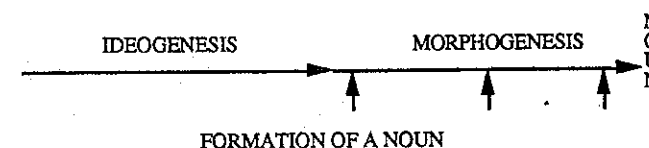
    It is hoped that these remarks will be sufficient to indicate how this type of analysis serves to interpret data collected by observing attested usage. They should also give some idea of the complexity of the resulting construct, the substantive noun, with its lexeme and various morphemes constituting an element of discourse. Of course, not all words are constructed on the same lines as the noun. The morphemic constituents of the verb, for example, are quite different from those of the noun, but the same technique of positioning them in the operative time of morphogenesis has thrown considerable light on this system of representation as well.[13] Even words like the articles, whose meaning consists of an extremely abstract representation, have been analyzed by means of the positioning technique and described on the basis of a necessary temporal relation between viewing something as indefinite, unidentified or as definite, identified. A potential meaning has been proposed for each article in the form of an operation of representation capable of engendering its different observed senses.[14]

    Thus it appears that the particularizing component and the categorizing components of the meaning of even apparently simple words in English like *boy*, *eat* and *the* are structured systematically. In other languages, the complexity of words may be far more apparent, their constructional mechanism being more clearly reflected in the make-up of the physical sign. Using the same positioning technique, Lowe (1985) has shown for three dialects of Eskimo that the rigorous syntax within the word reflects the system of its mental constituents, not just in situating the lexical with regard to the grammatical, but in ordering the components of each type. His work both confirms the widespread heuristic value of the method of analysis and, through a comparison of the word system in English with its counterpart in Eskimo (see his "Introduction") provides a healthy antidote to those who still unwittingly try to impose an English or Indo-european word system on languages with a different type of word.

5. THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

    Perhaps enough has been said to show why the following is not an empty claim:

    In any language the word constitutes a system. Discovering this sytem, that is, discovering the constructional mechanism behind the word, is the task of the psychosystematics of language, with its special technique called *positional linguistics*. (Guillaume 1984:109)

Based on the postulate of operative time, the positioning technique leads to a type of morphological analysis — what might be called operational morphology — which is at the heart of this approach and opens a vast program of research. By offering a means for solving the crucial problem of polysemy, this technique makes it possible to validate the claim that the word is a mechanism of representation. In this way, it permits an important development of the tradition which puts the word at the center of language as a unit of meaning.

Where does this approach fit in the contemporary scene? The postulate that the word is a representational mechanism mediating between private experience and sayable meaning — between incommunicable representations arising from the mechanisms (more specifically the psychomechanisms) of perception, memory, etc. and communicable representations arising from the psychomechanisms of language — entails a level of mental representation proper to word meanings. This involves an approach to semantics differing from the better known approaches today.

This renewed word-centred approach obviously has important implications for the study of syntax as well. In a language like English, for example,

A word with a material meaning, a word which is a lexeme, contains indications as to both its fundamental meaning and its intended use — the role, defined within certain limits, it is slated to play in the sentence; within these limits the word is delimited and its category determined. (Guillaume 1984:119)[15]

The conditioning influence of the word in this respect has been summarized as follows: "Each language has the syntax of its morphology." From this, of course, it follows not only that syntax plays an essential part in the meaning-expressing role of the sentence but that the formal relations established between words in a sentence is conditioned by the formal elements represented within words. That is to say, syntax is meaning dependent.

From Guillaume's point of view, then, language is essentially a "mechanism for commuting" some experience into something said. Determining whether or not the experience spoken about corresponds to something outside the speaker's mind lies beyond the limits of the linguist's competence, as does analyzing the psychomechanisms of perception or memory or imagination. Central to the linguist's field of competence, however, is the task of analyzing the psychomechanisms exploited in language which enable a speaker to commute something private — be it true or false, perceived, imagined, remembered, or otherwise conceived — into something public. And for this, an analysis of the mental system of the word in any language is the key.

6. CONCLUSION

The intent here is not to justify one approach to language — this would require a lengthy working over of the details of data in different areas of analysis — but rather to pose a problem and suggest a plausible solution. Either words, vocable units of tongue, are found in all languages and in every discourse, or they are not. Assuming they are (and the burden of proof is on those who would maintain the contrary), the tradition as expressed by Humboldt, Saussure and others must have some validity even if its raison d'être was not clearly established. Granted this, no scientific approach to language can afford to neglect the word as the fundamental theoretical problem.

I have suggested that Guillaume's approach offers a plausible solution. By postulating that the word consists essentially of a mechanism of representation permitting the speaker to pass from individual experience to representations with signs proper to each language, it provides a raison d'être for the word. By postulating that a language, being a mechanism, exists as a potential (tongue) permitting actual realizations (discourse), it provides a basis for explaining

polysemy. Finally, by postulating that every operation of the representational mechanism takes time, it provides a method for the linguist to analyze the different senses of a morpheme and arrive at a view of its potential meaning. For linguists who are not prepared to accept these assumptions, it remains to propose a more plausible solution to the problem of why the word is universal. After all, it is part of the pragmatism of science to adopt whatever works best, to accept that theory which explains most at the moment, assuming that one is always ready to develop, modify or replace it in order to obtain a fuller understanding of the object under study.

NOTES

[1] For helpful comments on this text I wish to thank several colleagues, particularly Bob Uhlenbeck, Peter Blumenthal, Patrick Duffley and Roch Valin.

[2] "... the word, in spite of the difficulty one has defining it, is a unit which imposes itself on the mind, something central in the mechanism of tongue...." (My translation)

[3] Considerable confusion arises from using the term "language" both in the everyday sense of 'the linguistic entity as a whole' and in the more restricted, technical sense opposed to "speech" (see following note) to serve as an equivalent for Saussure's *langue*. To avoid this confusion, the term "tongue" will be used in the latter, more restricted sense, a sense approximating that found in the expression "mother tongue" and "the tongues of men".

[4] The term "speech", used in the Humboldt translation, is replaced here by the more current term "discourse" because, for one thing, it is more general, including the written as well as the spoken manifestations of language.

[5] For the use of the term "tongue" here, see above, p.1, n.2.

[6] Stern's attempt to resolve the dilemma is hardly satisfying, to say the least: "The constant element in the meaning of the word *camera*, whenever used, is the fact that the word is referred to one or more of the objects belonging to the category of 'cameras'. *That category is an empirical fact* [my italics], the existence of which a philologist can simply take for granted. It is a problem for epistemology...." (p. 40)

[7] "The link between two uses of the same word is not based on material identity, nor on exact similarity of sense, but on elements that must be sought and will bring us close to the real nature of linguistic units." (my translation)

[8] Because of limited space, it will not be possible to outline Guillaume's distinction between different types of vocable, as in Guillaume 1991:188-189. The remarks that follow apply primarily to the type found in the Indo-european languages.

[9] The terms "microtime" and "macrotime" were introduced by Valin (1971:34) in a discussion exploring the diverse ways language is related to time. Macrotime consists of stretches long enough to be perceivable, whereas microtime involves durations too short to fall within the range of ordinary perceivability.

[10] See Wickens 1992 for an extensive examination of how the -s morpheme expresses discontinuity in garment names, tool names, liquids, and many other quite surprising areas of usage.

[11] These are not the only senses of the ø morpheme. For a more complete treatment and an analysis of the whole system see Hirtle 1982.

[12] For interesting analyses, see Ruhl 1990 and Picoche 1986, the latter applying Guillaume's positioning technique.

[13] See, for example, Korrel (1991) and Duffley (in press).

[14] See Hewson 1972 for a study of the article in English. See also Hirtle 1988 for a study of *some* and *any* based on the same method of analysis.

[15] Sapir (1949:30) makes a similar point concerning Latin.

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A CHALLENGE FOR UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR: VALENCY AND "FREE" ORDER IN UNDERLYING STRUCTURE

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If more attention is paid to the longterm development of linguistic theories, an approach can be achieved which allows for a more economical and more perspicuous description of languages displaying different degrees of configurationality. The present paper points out some principal theoretical differences between some of the dominant theories in the Anglo-Saxon tradition and the Praguian functional generative description; time does not permit a self-contained description of all the relevant theoretical and descriptive issues, but fuller discussions can be found in the references cited. I would like to deal with the desirability of a cumulative character of our science (Section 1.1) and with the possibility to specify a level of 'linguistic meaning' as a suitable starting point for semantic interpretation (1.2), to treat underlying grammatical relations without the notion of (immediate) constituent (1.3), to analyze the topic-focus articulation (1.4) and the three dimensions determined by (a) the syntactic relations in the narrow sense, (b) topic and focus, and (c) coordination. The approach outlined is then further characterized with respect to configurationality (2.1) and as a challenge to Chomsky's Universal Grammar (2.2). It may be concluded that the present diversity of approaches, if they are systematically compared, can lead to the desired cumulativity of the development of linguistics (3).

1. UNDERLYING STRUCTURE WITH TOPIC/FOCUS AS THE LEVEL OF LINGUISTIC MEANING

1.1. Cumulativity of the development of linguistics

One of the desirable aspects of the development of a science consists in its cumulative character. Even with the transition from one paradigm to another it