

1. THE EMERGENCE OF SEMANTICS

In the beginning was the word (John 1:1)

*What makes a word is its meaning. What makes an experience is also its meaning
(Vološinov 1929/2000: 26)*

1.1 Introduction

Language is probably the most significant characteristic of the human species and it is definitely the most crucial one differentiating humans from other species. In this book we will be concerned with semantics, which can be defined as the study of meaning in language, and we will present some theoretical frames of the fundamentals of meaning as developed in recent years.

Language consists of various levels (components or modules): phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and probably pragmatics. These levels are levels of language analysis, and have been necessitated by methodological considerations rather than by any functional principles (putting aside any theoretical perceptions). What is meant by that is that, when we use language, we use it as a functional whole rather than separately at each particular level. However, it is impossible to study anything, let alone advance any detailed theory about it, if we do not identify for reasons of methodology levels at which we can focus on more or less homogeneous phenomena; for instance, at the level of syntax we can deal with all linguistic phenomena relating to the structure of sentences or the grammatical strings of words. Likewise, at the level of semantics we group all those phenomena that are related to meaning-making in language.

In common parlance, the terms ‘semantics’ and ‘semantic’ are used to signify a matter of confusion relating to perceptions of meaning as in the following example from an editorial in the London paper on what appeared as Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. Rowan William’s call for sharia law in the UK:

What is more troubling is Dr. William’s apparent inability to see anything wrong with his remarks: his own clarification over the weekend retreated into semantics and arrogant intellectual obscurantism. (*Evening Standard*, 11 February 2008)

However, semantics in the linguistic terminology is often defined as the study of meaning. But what is meaning? This is a million dollar question that this book will try to answer to some extent. In a rather programmatic sense, we can recall that **semanticity** is one of Hockett's (1963: 10) design features of human spoken language and is defined as signals that mean something: they relate to the features of the world.

In semantics, unlike in phonetics, phonology, morphology or syntax, we are not concerned with the intra-linguistic system, or not just with that. That is, while at the other levels of analysis of language we can confine our research within the linguistic system, whether at the level of configurations of phonemes or morphemes or syntactic structures, in semantics we have to transcend the linguistic system in order to find out how we make sense of what we hear or read. We, as language-users, make sense of what we hear by associating language with the extra-linguistic world or reality. In other words, in semantics we need to determine how language *relates to the world*.

Semantics, however, is limited, at least in this book, to examining linguistic meaning attributed to items, units and structures that are linguistically encoded, while in **pragmatics** we extend inquiry into meaning-making to the interaction of such items with the context (when language is used in the community), and we also explore meaning-making that is not linguistically encoded, but rather 'invisible'.

1.2 Various ways of viewing Semantics

One way to define semantics would be to say that it is the theory of the relation between language and the world, as hinted at above. If we accept this definition, then the problem that arises is whether this relation is an **external** or an **internal** one.

If we claim that this relation is external, then we take the view that we can define meaning as an abstract relation between the observable language and its units (words, structures, etc.), on one hand, and the external world or reality to which these units refer or relate, on the other, irrespective of *how* language-users conceptualise or internalise this relation. To put it differently, the human factor (our mind and cognitive system, conceptual representations, etc.) is left out of the picture in this view of semantics. In other words, this approach adopts the viewpoint of **naïve** or **external realism**, or **external empiricism** or **naturalism**. Within this viewpoint the world consists of entities (its ontology) that have their own independent structure, which remains unaffected

by human perception, cognition and language. On this view, then, the world is assumed to be objective, independent of our representations of it and unrelated to the human factor. And the significance of language is a matter of aboutness, or of the connections between language and the world. We can then say that language is representative of the world; for example, the word or lexeme *dog* stands for the whole set of dogs, and the expression *the dog* can be said to refer to its referent, a specific dog, without any interference of the speaker's mental apparatus (see chapter 4). This approach may be called extensional semantics, or extensionalism (from the term *extension* that refers to classes of objects). Certain versions of the external view though can assume an interface between external reality and a cognitive level or a language of thought. But in external semantics representations of meanings always extend to the external reality (categories or sets of things and their members).

On the other hand, if we view this relation between language and the world as being internalised and mediated by the human mind, then we examine it as a body of knowledge of the language-user, but not as representing, or referring to, outside reality. In other words, viewing this relation as an internal one, takes on board that perception and cognition of the external world is filtered through the language-user's mind and cognition. On this view, it is the language-user's way of cognising this relation between language and the world that highlights meaning and forms the focus of semantics.

One might argue that this distinction is rather illusory as any description of a theory will ultimately have to rely on mental representations which are derived from an internal way of viewing and configuring external things and relations. A more viable distinction would better be based on the question of whether we need to view the linguistic apparatus as a separate module from our cognitive one or not.

Naturally, there are more ways of defining semantics on a broader basis. For example, we may view meaning on a socio-pragmatic basis, if we concentrate on how we perform in language, or what we do with language as social human beings partaking in society and performing various roles in it. This type of semantics would have a broad basis including within its purview the use of language, that is, pragmatic aspects of its use. This type of semantics could be a *use semantics* but we feel that such a theory would be legitimately included within the field of pragmatics (see Tsohatzidis 1994).

In this textbook, the emphasis is laid variably: on the more traditional view of semantics as being external to the interpreter of language in chapters

concerned with views of semantics stemming from philosophy of language (at least chapters 4, 5 and 6), but the internal view is also highlighted in other parts. In fact, the most prevalent internalist or inward-looking type of semantics developed quite recently champions a unitary view of both language and cognition, the former reflecting the latter, both constituting an inseparable module, hence its name of cognitive semantics (see Marmaridou 2000). Occasionally, these two stances on meaning (with a range of variation) will merge in the treatment of some issues, as in word meaning (ch. 7). However, some basic insights from cognitive semantics will be given in a separate chapter (ch. 9).¹

In the next section, we will cast a brief glance at the history of linguistics in the 20th century with a view to finding out how semantics emerged as a significant field in linguistics so that we can plot it on the linguistics map.

1.3 Linguistic Semantics

The 20th century is a century of linguistic awareness. Indeed, it can be called a century of linguistics and we will see why in what follows. However, as our subject-matter is semantics, we will limit our attention primarily to the factors that affected the development of semantics. So we will review briefly the main landmarks in linguistics that marked the 20th century.

Landmarks in the history of semantics: its emergence

1.3.1 Linguistics (Continental)

1.3.1.1 The 19th century

This century was the era of ‘historical’ or ‘diachronic linguistics’, or ‘philology’, or ‘comparative philology’. Linguistic inquiry was preoccupied with historical aspects of languages and interrelations of languages, and with their classification and the reconstruction of lost ‘proto-languages’. In one word, historical

1. The distinction between external and internal viewing of language is rather crude, and the matter is much more complicated than it appears here; e.g., Chomsky’s mentalist view of language is an internalist one, but it is not associated with the brand of cognitive semantics referred to at this point. In fact, Chomsky’s (1986) notion of E-language would be more closely associated with speakers’ data, in a way with performance, while his I-language with grammar or the language system, or competence, in a sense. Also, Jackendoff’s perception of this distinction includes his own brand of semantics which is distinct both from cognitive linguistics and Chomskian linguistics.

linguistics was concerned with the (re)construction of the Indo-European language family tree theory. This trend reflected the historical intellectual preoccupation of previous centuries, for example, historical developments in the work of scientists such as Darwin and Mendel.

1.3.1.2 The 20th century

The turn of the 20th century marks a shift of research interests in language study. The question of ‘What languages there are, there have been’ gives way to ‘What is language?’, focusing on the synchronic aspects of the problem, and ‘language’ is used in the singular as a human trait.

This shift of views amounts to detailed analyses of units and elements within language. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the inspired Swiss linguist, preaching (or teaching) new methodologies and views on linguistics at the beginning of the century, brought about a major revolution, the structural revolution, as we can call it, not only in linguistics but also in other disciplines.² Its name, **structural**, derives from Saussure’s views that language is a structural system and the method of approaching it should be in explicating and unravelling these internal structural relations of the units of the system.

If Einstein’s ideas led to making the 20th century one of physics, Saussure’s **structural linguistics** led to making the 20th century one of linguistics, too. Saussure is the founder of **structuralism**, a philosophy that dominated the practice in many disciplines (Psychology, Sociology, Literature, Anthropology, Semiotics, etc.).

But as structuralism spread from linguistics to other disciplines as well, forging their epistemological background and lending them a secure methodology, 20th century can be called the structural century (structuralism, deconstruction, etc.). Seemingly unconnected disciplines and schools of thought, such as psychoanalysis and anthropology, are also closely affiliated with structural linguistics, since the latter provides them with either an inspiration or a methodological tool.

Moreover, just as Einstein’s physics sought to manipulate subatomic particles in ways that produced everything from atom bombs to silicon chips, structural linguistics is marked by manipulation of sublexemic, but also subphonemic, features in quest of the most minimal primitive distinctive features constituting language. Semantics, being a component of linguistics, was permeated

2. See Holdcroft (1991) for an excellent exposition and discussion of Saussure’s main theses.

by the same logic, and minute analyses, as we will see (e.g., 7.6), were advanced in explaining meanings of lexical units.

1.3.1.3 *The year 1916*

This year is marked by the posthumous publication of Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*. In this seminal work Saussure parts company with the tradition of historical linguistics of the previous century and introduces the orientation towards descriptive linguistics; he institutes the dichotomy between **diachronic** and **synchronic linguistics**.

Structuralist linguistics schools of various denominations, though all converging on the same general principle, spring up on the Continent³ – Prague, Geneva, Copenhagen – and in London. The view taken by structuralists parallels the emerging outlook in physics that occurred around the same time: elements, such as an electron or a quark, in general, are not entities in the old sense but rather the product of various relations, and do not exist independently of these relations and forces. Similarly, a phoneme cannot be determined irrespective of other relations, but acquires substance only in terms of contrastive and alignment relations. And meaning on this emerging view is an intra-systemic, relational phenomenon, rather than a posited autonomous concept. The structuralist viewpoint is that linguistic structure is more significant than content; structuralist analyses, therefore, focus on structure rather than content. American structuralism very much follows in the same tradition.

Although Saussure talks of the nature of the sign, his *Cours* does not include a specific chapter on Semantics. The term *semantics* makes its appearance around the beginning of 20th century, and since then it has been used steadily to signify the field of research in linguistic meaning. Other terms that had been used up to that time, such as *sematology*, *semology*, *semasy*, *sensifics*, gave way to *semantics*. Just like the term *semantics*, the majority of the terms used in the past to signify the field of research are related to the Greek word *σημασία* ('*semasia*'), which means 'meaning' or 'Bedeutung' and *semantikos* (= significant).

Saussure's structural principles are first introduced into semantics by Trier with his theory of **semantic fields** (see 9.4), which, however, does not reach linguistic circles until about 1950, probably due to the intervening war. 'Structural Semantics' appears on the agenda of the 8th International Congress of Linguists, in Oslo, 1957, and also on that of the 9th, at Cambridge, Mass., in 1962.

3. There is a rather funny way in UK of referring to Europe as 'The Continent'.

1.3.2 Linguistics (American)

Around the third decade of 20th century in America, Korzybski (1879-1950) (originally Polish) develops his own brand of semantics, which he calls General Semantics. This type of semantics, which is dismissed by many practitioners of the time, is empirical and therapeutic in its preoccupation.⁴

The most prominent structuralist linguists in America were Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and Leonard Bloomfield (1887-1949). Although Bloomfield was a student of Sapir, a mentalist, he nevertheless distanced himself from his views, probably influenced by the general climate of the time,⁵ and adopted an empiricist perspective on language. This empiricist stance dictated that only observable phenomena could be described and, consequently, meaning phenomena, while acknowledged, had to be brushed aside. He wrote:

The meanings of speech-forms could be scientifically defined only if all branches of science, including, especially, psychology and physiology, were close to perfection. Until that time, phonology and, with it, all the semantic phase of language study, rests upon an assumption, the fundamental assumption of linguistics: we must assume that *in every speech-community some utterances are alike in form and meaning*.

(Bloomfield 1933/1983: 78)

And further down he adds:

The statement of meanings is therefore the weak point in language-study, and will remain so until knowledge advances very far beyond its present state.

(Bloomfield 1933/1983: 140)

If linguistics were to be defined as a science and ‘naturalised’ by the natural sciences, a prevalent view of linguists of that time, then semantics, as the study of meaning, had to be ousted from such a scientific discipline. So there was no place for semantics in linguistics.⁶

Charles Morris’s (1901-1979) work exerted a great influence on the development of semantics. He was an American philosopher who was conversant

4. However, Karol Janicki (1990) argues for the connection between this brand of semantics and cognitive linguistics introduced in the late 1970s, early 1980s and widely practised since then.

5. It must be noted that that was an era of empiricist philosophy both in America and in England. It was an era of intense ‘scientificism’ with scientific achievement in physics and mathematics alike, an era of behavioural psychology (Skinner).

6. The perception of linguistics as science was reflected in the names originally given to the first University Departments in the UK, such as *Dept of the Science of Language*, etc. Moreover, most Departments bore the name of *Phonetics*.

with logical positivism (the Vienna Circle), a philosophy that shaped most of 20th century Anglo-Saxon philosophy, which gave rise to philosophical semantics, as we will see below (1.4). His major work was in semiotics, the theory of signs, which is considered to embrace semantics (see 2.1.). He distinguished three levels of analysis in language:

- a. **syntactics** – which involves the formal structure,
- b. **semantics** – which is concerned with the relation between signs and objects, and
- c. **pragmatics** – which is concerned with the analysis of language as communication as used by its interpreters.

To Charles Morris we owe the term **pragmatics**, as well as this tripartite distinction.

By the 1950s, however, the post-Bloomfieldian empirical structural linguists were rather dispirited, as the intellectual climate in philosophy was changing fast from a staunch empiricist (verificationist) dogma⁷ to the much more relaxed ‘principle of falsifiability’ (Karl Popper).⁸ It was in this climate that Chomsky constructed his new theory. What was significant was that he shifted attention from the phonological and morphological systems, which were focal in structural linguistics, to the syntax of the language, hence the title of his groundbreaking book, *Syntactic Structures* (1957). After the publication of *Syntactic Structures* all linguists or students of linguistics had to work on syntax. Syntax became trendy. In a sense, therefore, Chomsky’s syntactic theory brought linguistic analysis closer to the semantic level despite its total neglect of it, as the next level of analysis to claim the scholars’ focus would have to be that of semantics.

Indeed, semantics was non-existent within this earlier Chomskian (1957) paradigm, and only after Katz and Fodor’s (1963) seminal paper, which presented an analysis of lexical meaning in terms of bundles of semantic features (see 7.6), is a semantic component included in Chomsky’s Extended Standard Theory (EST) (*Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, 1965 and thereafter).

However, this type of semantics is very much concerned with lexical meaning to the extent that this is significant for syntactic behaviour or is necessitated by syntactic regularities. Indeed, Wierzbicka repeated a widely held view when she recently wrote that “...neither Chomsky nor Chomskians have ever taken any serious interest in the meaning of words” (1994: 432). But it is equally sen-

7. The meaning of a proposition is the method of its verification (The Vienna Circle).

8. A statement is meaningful if it is in principle falsifiable.

sible to agree with McCawley (1976: 6) who writes that Chomsky's *Aspects* "brought semantics out of the closet". And this is true because once meaning is brought into the picture, it is not necessarily false to claim that these semantic considerations will affect the syntactic component of a grammar. In other words, semantic features are expected to play a role in the functioning of the syntactic or phonological rules, despite Chomsky's contrary views (Chomsky, 1965: 226).

Chomsky's type of approach, too, although very different in scope from philosophical, model-theoretic, formal approaches to meaning (see chapters 5 and 6), lies within the range of formalisable solutions to the question 'what is meaning?'

A decisive influence on this burgeoning new (non-historical, descriptive) semantics also comes from different quarters: from the emergence of the new field of **stylistics**, which is both sensitive and receptive to developments in linguistic theory. Within the framework of the new stylistics language is scrutinised, and appreciation of its different functions becomes pertinent to literary criticism. Jakobson's⁹ seminal paper "Linguistics and Poetics", read at the Conference on Style at Indiana University in 1958, marks the beginning of the new era in stylistics (Cf. Sebeok, 1960). This cross-fertilisation was of great significance for the development of semantics and, more recently, pragmatics.

Another line of thought within linguistic circles that led to an acute awareness of the significance of meaning phenomena and to the subsequent development of semantics came from the United States and, in particular, from Chomsky's former associates. As is well known, Chomsky had advanced a theory of language that was primarily a syntactic one. His 1957 theory of language did not allow any semantic component, as is repeatedly stressed in his book *Syntactic Structures*, while in his 1965 extended model *Aspects* (EST= Extended Standard Theory) he acknowledged a limited semantic component.

Rejection of this paradigm, as so often happens in politics and academia alike, sprang from the ingroup of Chomsky's disciples right in the heart of the Ivy League MIT¹⁰. The so-called 'younger Turks' rebelled against the straight-jacketing effects of the Chomskian (or Chomskyite!) syntactic paradigm. The first objections to the 'bible', Chomsky's syntactic theory, came soon after the publication of his *Aspects* and before 1970, when Chomsky's former associates flocked away from his orbit of influence (and MIT).

9. Jakobson originally came from the Prague School of linguistics.

10. Chomsky and his associates were at MIT.

The ‘younger Turks’¹¹, mainly George Lakoff, John Robert Ross, James McCawley, Paul Postal, David Perlmutter and others (also called **generative semanticists**, as against **generative interpretivists**, Chomsky and his associates, e.g., Ray Jackendoff and Joseph Emonds, all in USA), set on a quest for a solution to the problems besetting a syntactic account, squinted remarkably across disciplines, and their eyes were caught by the practitioners in the field of philosophy of language. The main outcome of this exploration came in the form of the postulation of very abstract underlying logical structures that were to jettison Chomsky’s syntactic structures as the deep structures in the linguistic theory they proposed. These logical structures were semantic structures posited at the primary level of language and formed its deep structure. So, for the generative semanticist of the time semantics (or logical form) was both universal and primary, substituting for Chomsky’s syntactic structure.

At the same time, there was also a host of syntacticians, who, although they did not enter the linguistics polemics between the generative semanticists and generative interpretivists, flocked around Montague’s brand of semantics and worked on this line developing his theory after his untimely death. This hub of research flourished as what later came to be called formal semantics.

Thus, semantics infiltrated grammatical theory and, once it came on stage, it was there to stay for good. Today’s grammatical theories descending from Chomskian interpretivist quarters posit logical form (LF) and generally pay attention to semantic issues. One might say that this awareness was primarily brought about by the generative semanticists’ research of the time. Generative semantics petered out into a number of other theories, but mostly developed into cognitive grammar (later to be called ‘cognitive semantics’) as early as 1975 (Lakoff and Thompson, 1975).

The demise of generative semantics was unavoidable as its practitioners were set on reducing, not just semantic, but all extralinguistic pragmatic issues, in effect cultural issues, into grammatical analysis. Desirable as this approach may be, it is highly unfeasible. It has been proven that pragmatic phenomena can hardly be forced into a unitary grammatical theory and it is best to maintain distinct components in linguistic theory.¹² Yet, while in the early 1970s there

11. I still remember the harsh polemical language used by generative semanticists in their papers of those days, not emulated by Chomsky. McCawley (2009) is a good brief account of the rise and demise of generative semantics.

12. This view is the most prevalent one in syntactic quarters nowadays, but there are other schools of linguistic theory (for example, cognitive linguistics or construction grammar), which take a holistic view of linguistic matters.

was hardly any awareness of pragmatic issues, generative semanticists, by pointing to a multitude of cases where syntax interacted with pragmatic issues, brought about an acute appreciation, not only of semantic interference with syntax, but also of pragmatic issues and the toll they take on syntactic matters. The subsequent veneration of semantic issues in syntactic quarters can be said to be owed to generative semantics.

It would be unfair, however, to imply even for a minute that Chomsky was unaware of the importance of semantics. Rather, it was his choice to leave semantic phenomena outside the purview of his theory. He wrote as early as 1968:

On the other hand, we can bring to the study of formal structures and their relations a wealth of experience and understanding. It may be that at this point we are facing a problem of conflict between significance and feasibility ... I feel fairly confident that the abstraction to the study of formal mechanisms of language is appropriate; my confidence arises from the fact that many quite elegant results have been achieved on the basis of this abstraction.

(Chomsky 1968/1972: 112)

1.3.3 Linguistics in the UK

A notable exception to this type of linguistics that did not pay any attention to meaning phenomena practised at the time was M.A.K. Halliday's¹³ brand of systemic-functional linguistics, developed at the beginning of the second half of 20th century. Halliday adopted a rather holistic outlook on language, recasting grammar as modes of meaning.

This type of linguistics, enriched by the tradition of the functional school of linguistics on the Continent, derived mostly from the type of linguistics advanced rather independently by John Rupert Firth (1890-1960). But Firth, who was given the first chair of Linguistics in UK, London, in 1944, viewed language within its total context of situation and believed that a complete specification of the meaning of a word could only be given within its context of occurrence.

Firth's (1957) contextual theory of meaning, integrating levels of language, was advanced in UK at the same time as Bloomfield separated levels of analysis and scoffed at meaning in language as an illegitimate area of study. Today, Halliday's functional theory of language, integrating all levels of analysis, is not confined to just linguistics or to the UK only but has spread throughout the world as a significant mode of theorising in linguistics and related fields.

13. One of my teachers, I'm grateful to say.

1.4 Philosophical Semantics

1.4.1 Logical Positivism-Ordinary Language Philosophy

As we have seen, then, there was no semantics in linguistics, especially in the linguistics practised in America. While there was no semantics in linguistics, we can also say that there was no linguistics in semantics either. But this statement takes on board that semantics evolved, not from linguistics, but rather from the philosophy of language, or ordinary language philosophy, which in its turn was the offspring of linguistic philosophy developed at the turn of the 20th century and thereafter.

Linguistic philosophy or **Anglo-Saxon 20th century analytic philosophy** was a type of philosophy that was concerned with studying and analysing the meaning of sentences in language. In its most purist version, **Logical Empiricism** or **Logical Positivism** (the Vienna Circle on the Continent, 1925-1936), this approach to philosophy aspired to construct an artificial language that bore little affinities to natural language. Its preoccupation was not the study of meaning in natural language, but rather the construction of an ideal language in which deficiencies and inaccuracies of natural language would be eliminated so that the true structure of a perfect language would emerge. This ideal language would serve as the tool for scientific inquiry. Imprecision and deficiencies of natural language would, on this view, lead scientific inquiry on faulty paths and so they had to be eradicated.

Logical positivists advocated that, by specifying the scientific method that reflected our rational thinking, they would develop a theory that would verify our statements. This method, then, would yield verifiable statements, which could be used in scientific theories. Their method was called **verifiability theory of meaning** ('the meaning of a statement is the method of its verification'). Whatever statement was not directly verifiable was 'discarded' as meaningless. And, of course, the only acceptable viable verificationist method was that of logic.

As becomes evident, this tradition concentrated on the descriptive function of language, since logicians and philosophers working in this tradition sought to develop a tool that would be suitable for expressing scientific statements in scientific fields such as mathematics and physics. They were concerned with declarative sentences rather than other types, such as interrogative or imperative. This tradition is a very long one since it goes back to Aristotle, who writes in *De Interpretatione* (16a1-17a7):

(27) ἔστι δὲ λόγος ἅπας μὲν σημαντικός, οὐχ ὡς ὄργανον δέ, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ εἴρηται, κατὰ συνθήκην· (28) ἀποφαντικός δὲ οὐ πᾶς, ἀλλ' ἐν ᾧ τὸ ἀληθεύειν ἢ ψεύδεσθαι ὑπάρχει· (29) οὐκ ἐν ἅπασιν δὲ ὑπάρχει, οἷον ἡ εὐχὴ λόγος μὲν, ἀλλ' οὔτε ἀληθὴς οὔτε ψευδής. (30) οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄλλοι ἀφείσθωσαν, — ῥητορικῆς γὰρ ἢ ποιητικῆς οἰκιοτέρα ἢ σκέψις, — ὁ δὲ ἀποφαντικός τῆς νῦν θεωρίας. (Αριστοτέλης 1994: 186)

[(27) Every sentence is significant, not organically, but, as I said, conventionally. (28) Not every one is a proposition, only that in which there is truth or falsity, (29) and that is not in all of them; a wish, for instance, is a sentence, but neither true nor false. (30) We pass over the other kinds, which are better considered in rhetoric or poetics. We are only concerned with the (declarative) proposition.] (Aristotle 2007)

Towards the end of the first half of 20th century, however, philosophers gradually became more interested in natural language and tried to unravel the intricacies of aspects of its meaning and function. These philosophers were concerned with natural language or **ordinary language** and were called **ordinary language philosophers**. In this trend in philosophy we can firmly identify the roots of semantics, but also, later, of pragmatics.

Philosophical semantics or **model-theoretical semantics** is a type of semantics that was developed in the second half of the 20th century, when logicians and philosophers argued that natural language can be translated into logical form. So logical form (chapter 5) is said to represent straightforwardly natural language and not an artificial language of limited utility.

1.5 Liaison Between Philosophy and Linguistics

It did not take very long for these two very distinct traditions, the one of linguistics and the other developed within philosophy, to join forces in promoting the interests of semantics. This liaison, however, did not take place until quite late in the 20th century, in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Again, it was no other than Chomsky admonishing this turn to analytic philosophy in 1968, though he mostly restricted his focus to problems of reference:

...the linguist would do well to turn to work in analytic philosophy, particularly to the many studies of referential opacity. (Chomsky 1968/1972: 164)

However, it is right to add that, while Chomsky could see the benefits to be accrued from borrowing a philosophical slant in the field of linguistics, he never-

theless felt semantics was a threat to the autonomy of syntax and was rather hostile to the inclusion of a rich component of semantics within his theory.

Notwithstanding Katz and Fodor's (1963) importation of a philosophical conception of meaning into linguistic theory, probably the first philosopher to turn his eyes to linguistics was Quine, who originally turned to Bloomfieldian linguistics in an attempt to broaden his philosophical methodology and outlook. Later Quine encouraged and supported Chomsky in developing his theory. Katz (1996: 601) describes the situation at the time very aptly:

Quine's importing of the methodological ideas of taxonomic linguistics into philosophy in order to undercut the liberal wing of contemporary empiricism and Fodor's and [Katz's] importing of traditional intensionalist ideas from philosophy into linguistics in an attempt to construct a semantic theory in generative grammar opened a communication channel between linguistics and philosophy. Over the years, much two-way traffic has flowed through it. In slightly over three decades, American linguists went from a discipline with no semantics to one in which semantic issues occupy a significant place, and philosophy of language went from an area which ignored the scientific study of natural language to one which increasingly requires knowledge of formal linguistics to understand philosophical discussions of language and meaning.

This channel of communication between linguistics, mostly in USA, and philosophy of language or philosophical semantics was considerably widened in the early 1970s by the 'younger Turks', alias generative semanticists, as we have already seen. These linguists were initially a splinter group advocating that generative grammar should incorporate logical structures at the deep level of analysis. These logical structures were semantic rather than syntactic ones, and semantics on this view was a very abstract level of syntax. The term 'generative semantics' is owed to this thesis. But we must also mention the team of syntacticians in USA working in linguistics and philosophy, incorporating philosophical perspectives into their linguistic analyses (Montagovian semantics) giving rise to the brand of formal semantics.

George Lakoff and James McCawley, but also all these syntacticians, soon discovered that their greatly reduced syntactic categories (mainly sentence, noun phrase and verb) corresponded very closely to the categories of proposition, argument and predicate of symbolic logic (see chapters 5 and 6 below) practised in philosophical quarters at the same time.

What is important to notice is that this discovery showed them that the categories isolated in language were also logical categories corresponding to categories of thought. Such logical categories are then universal rather than

language-specific. So the generative semanticist's theory of language was a theory of 'natural logic', as George Lakoff called generative semantics (1972). This natural logic reflected reasoning in natural language and as such it was a fuzzy logic, of course.

The importation of the philosophers' method and focus on meaning phenomena into grammatical analysis by generative semanticists at that time was so acute that it is aptly described by Newmeyer (1986: 175) as follows:

In fact, it does not seem unfair to say that the early 1970s saw many generative semanticists gradually transformed into ordinary language philosophers, as informal descriptions of language use replaced the construction of a grammatical theory as their immediate priority.

1.6 Linguistic semantics and philosophical semantics

As we have seen, the concerns of linguistic semantics differ from those of philosophical semantics as do their origins. Below is a diagrammatic version of their provenance:

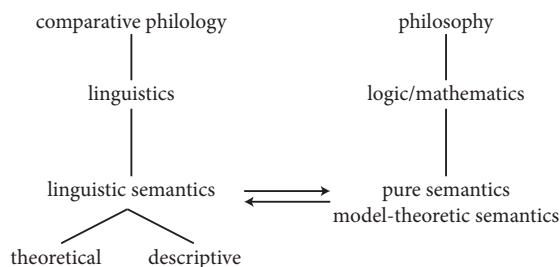


Figure 1.1: Origin of linguistic semantics and pure semantics

Semantic representations in philosophical semantic theories are supposed to reflect directly the relation between linguistic forms and states of affairs in the world, and take the form of propositions (thoughts expressed by sentences) and truth conditional statements (whether they are true or false, see section 5.8). Semantic systems of this denomination will use formalism, such as the propositional and the predicate calculi (section 5.6), in order to give rigorous accounts of semantic representations.

In this tradition, therefore, semanticists do not draw on any other faculty of the human mind in devising semantic systems. The widespread view taken in this sector is that the linguistic faculty does not necessarily interact with any

other faculty of the human mind, and even if it does, this interaction does not fall within the purview of semantics. Language, in general, and semantics in particular, is viewed as a self-contained system and in explaining it no reference needs to be made to other faculties of human behaviour and/or cognition. This type of semantics then is an external semantics.