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Some remarks on the notion  
"semantic component"

This paper attempts to present certain theoretical issues arising from recent semantic research and componential analysis in particular. No endeavour will be made to present definite solutions to any of the controversial problems of contemporary semantics. The discussion centres round the question of the semantic component, the formal division of semantic components, their functions and theoretical status. In this paper, the conventional practice of presenting semantic components in square brackets, with the additional device of capitalization, is used to distinguish them from lexical items.

To do justice to the history of semantic thought, it ought to be mentioned that although the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the flourish of field theory and componential analysis, certainly witnessed the climax of semantic investigation, the principle of atomicity has been prominent in semantic research ever since Leibnitz suggested that a universal symbolic language could be constructed /cf. Lyons 1977:330/. However, before the notion of the semantic component could be put forward and become rooted in semantic research, a breakthrough with respect to meaning autonomy had to be made. The contextual bias in semantic analysis found its ultimate culmination in such works as Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations /1953/ with his even then controversial view, according to which, the meaning of words was viewed through the filter of their actual usage in the language. Extreme contextualists, of whom Walpole is one of the most representative, went even so far as to claim that "a symbol has meaning only in context" /Walpole 1941:105/.

Conversely, within the framework of context independent analysis, word meaning is viewed as an independent, structured, hierarchically ordered, or unordered bundle of cognitive elements which makes the designation of its denotatum /denotata/ possible. Following this, since 1963, both generative and interpretative semantics attempted to analyze meanings with the assumption that one should atomize meanings of words into the smallest, indivisible cognitive elements with the view to obtaining, as a final product, a dictionary consisting of lexical entries with semantic readings attached to them. Thus, each entry in the dictionary is seen as consisting of a phonological representation, a set of syntactic markers, and finally a string of symbols called semantic components together with a complex symbol named selectional restriction /cf. Katz 1971:298/. Thus specified, each entry in the dictionary represents one of word meanings:

- bachelor -----  $\rightarrow N_1, N_2, \dots, N_k$
1. [..j] + [..j] + [..j]
  2. [PHYSICAL OBJECT] + [LIVING] + [MARRY] + [MALE] + [ADULT] + [NEVER MARRIED] + [SR]
  3. [..j] + [..j] + [..j] etc.

Apart from the attempts to rid itself of the limitations of contextualism, current semantic research stresses that the meaning of a sign must not be confused with its denotation or that which it denotes, the latter being completely outside linguistic analysis. Fodor /1977/ maintains that the view, according to which, meanings are seen as entities that stand in some special relation to expressions, is what lies behind the identification of meanings with referents or with ideas.

One of the basic controversies centres on the formal shape of semantic components. Primarily, as introduced by Katz and Fodor, semantic components were dichotomized into markers and distinguishers. Similarly, as syntactic markers which enable the formulation of empirical generalizations about the syntactic structure of linguistic constructions, so semantic components make it possible to arrive at certain generalizations about the meaning of words and longer stretches of discourse. Thus, for example, sea, lake, river, channel

have a semantic component in common which is not part of semantic reading of any of the following words: man, bachelor, clown, chap. The words of the first set are similar in meaning in that they share the component of the [NON-HUMAN], whereas all the words from the second set would have an [HUMAN] component included in their semantic readings. Therefore, it may be generalized that semantic markers reflect the systematic relations that hold among word meanings. Distinguishers, on the other hand, reflect the idiosyncratic peculiarities of word meanings; [COLOUR] would be a semantic marker in the specification of all colour words viz., yellow, black, white etc., but still, they would be separated by distinguishers [YELLOW], [BLACK], [WHITE], etc.

Unfortunately, the necessary and adequate conditions for deciding whether a particular component is to be labelled as a marker or distinguisher were not specified by Katz and Fodor, and, therefore, ever since their introduction it has often been objected that, in actual analysis, this distinction is hard to maintain. Bollinger /1965/ alludes that it is equally plausible to abandon the notion of distinguisher by converting it into a string of markers. Similarly, Bierwisch /1965/ proposes that distinguishers can be further decomposed into components equal, in status, to semantic markers. Weinreich /1966/ finds the criteria for the marker-distinguisher dichotomy unjustified and suggests that the entire concept of distinguishers appears to stand on precarious ground.

One could argue that all semantic components, of whatever taxonomic value and generalizing power, might be labelled as "components inherent to x", and the aims of semantic atomization would be duly accomplished. On second thoughts, however, one comes to realize that meaning analysis does not merely denote splitting a given meaning into semantically primitive cognitive elements but rather, as a co-product, not a by-product, one expects to set in a formalized manner semantic regularities, systematic structuring, as well as idiosyncratic distinctions holding among different members of what is to be the lexicon. Moreover, on the level of a single lexical item, one wants to express hierarchical structuring of a single semantic reading. We do not claim that some semantic components are more important than others. Beyond doubt, however, some of them are hierarchically and taxonomically more revealing and should thus be specified. In other words, it is not enough to extract components of

meaning, one also needs suggestive labels which would serve taxonomic and categorizing purposes. At the present state of research, it appears that only by means of some formal partition, be it Nida's /1975/ common and diagnostic components or Katz's dualism, is it possible to make generalizations about the structure of the lexicon.

On the other hand, those who go on endlessly multiplying both components and components' labels seem oblivious of the dangers of a vicious circle they are prone to encounter. Among others, Nida, Louw and Smith /1977/ postulate the need for accepting supplementary components in order to make decomposition complete. Supplementary components, as defined by them, are those that may be connotatively but not denotatively valid, but are not really necessary or significant for establishing a minimal set of contrasts /Nida, Louw and Smith 1977:149/. The issue of the supplementary components seems to be an offspring of a vital question of how far the extraction of semantic components can or should be taken, how "delicate" the network of semantic reading should be. In other words, this controversy revolves around the issue of whether one should extract only those components which recur throughout the dictionary of a language viz., [HUMAN], [OBJECT], [MALE] or [FEMININE], or, continue extracting semantic primitives as long as possible - from the most generic to the most specific components of which [SPIKE] for the specification of roses may be a good example. In all likelihood, owing to a detailed extraction thus understood, intended specifications certainly are denotatively adequate, but are we really entitled to call them semantic components? Beyond doubt, the only answer to this question must be a qualified no! It should be borne in mind that, by employing, in linguistic analysis, components which are derived from the nature of referents, one is bound to enter consciously and voluntarily a realm which lies well beyond linguistic analysis as such. Apart from this purely methodological objection, one is tempted to ask the following question: which criteria would govern the selection of what are thought to be components, but in actual practice, are attributes of the real world? Obviously, it is not difficult to imagine such a list, but it would be highly improbable to supply independent criteria which would determine where linguistic analysis ends and pragmatics begins and how to differentiate between an arbitrarily established bundle of attributes of the real world and an objectively relevant, non-redundant set of semantic components.

To sum up, we are trying to show that by accepting the need for an endless enumeration of "components" which are derived from the nature of referents, one would have to try and justify a great number of components, leaving the answer to the question of how immense the quantum of components should be, wide open. On the other hand, it needs to be mentioned, we find it difficult to support Bever and Rosenbaum /1970:5/ who claim that the most highly valued semantic analysis is the one which utilizes the smallest number of symbols in a particular form of semantic analysis. Instead, we suggest, "the smallest" should be substituted by "as small as possible" because it certainly may prove to be very economical to distinguish by means of components, tea from coffee using as few components as possible, but, the same cannot be said about pairs like book and love, cigarette from friendship, and many, many others. In other words, if a large number of components is indispensable for the semantic representation of word meaning, this is because users of the language know much more that can be expressed by "the smallest" number of symbols about concepts represented by signs; semantic representation can neither be redundant nor arbitrary and counter-intuitive.

Now, we should like to point to a certain functional peculiarity exhibited by semantic components. Making use of common and diagnostic components, as suggested by Nida /1975/, it may be observed that in actual analysis common components manifest a dual function of a sort that they, almost as a rule, double, beyond the limits of a given semantic domain, the role of diagnostic components separating the designated meanings of the domain x from all the members of all other domains. Thus, for example, the component [HUMAN] is diagnostic in separating the meaning of father /pertaining to human parents/ from that of sire /pertaining to non-human parents/. At the same time however, [HUMAN] constitutes the common component of x-words pertaining to kinship terminology. We are hinting at the multifunctional character of components in the light of our previous discussion on the marker-distinguisher controversy. One might speculate even further and suggest that the multifunctional nature of semantic components forms a well-grounded argument backing those who would wish to study the ways in which the contentious issue of dichotomy could be finally done away with.

The question of what is understood by the term "semantic component" and the kinds of components employed in semantic analysis is closely

related to the question of how components ought to be symbolized. In other words, what is the theoretical status of the labels employed to signify semantic components? It is to be regretted that so far no adequate metalinguistic has been devised to substitute the currently used MARKERSE / as it is called by Allan 1981:151-153/ whose theoretical status rests merely on its being called a theoretical construction. Various authors find it a challenge to try and answer the question of mutual relation between metalinguistic [HUMAN], [MALE], [OBJECT] and object language human, male, object. Weinreich /1966/ states that there is no difference between object language and meta-language; that is, words used in definitions of terms are no different in principle from the words defined /cf. Lehner 1974:47/. Lyons /1977/, Lehner /1974/, Katz /1971/ and many others maintain that although components take the form of words given in the orthography of a natural language they are to be regarded as theoretical constructions and are not to be identified with words and expressions used to provide them with suggestive labels /cf. Katz 1971:299/.

The final problem we intend to touch upon is that of indeterminacy in postulating semantic components. It seems fairly obvious that any group of words, whose semantic readings share most of the components but differ in the specification which determines some dimension, is of the greatest difficulty in semantic description. However, the cases of indeterminacy thus delimited have nothing /or very little/ to do with linguistic facts, but rather derive from perceptual inaccuracy, extralinguistic phenomena and changes. It would certainly be a challenge to attempt to determine a bundle of components which would facilitate distinctive readings for stream and river. Due to the idiosyncratically flexible conceptual boundary between these two concepts, what may appear to be a stream for one person may be a river for someone else. The example just given is very similar to the anecdotal example quoted by Verschuren /1981/ who ponders when a leaky boat becomes a wreck, or that of Nida /1975: 20/ who wonders what diagnostic components could be established to give distinctive semantic characterizations for tree and bush.

We have attempted to discuss certain controversial issues revolving around the question of the semantic component and some satellite problems which arise in the context of semantic analysis. Within the limits of this paper, our aim was to show that the number of gains equals the number of doubts concerning both the concept of semantic

component itself as well as its usage in actual analysis. The most controversial of them all, it seems, are the marker-distiguisher dualism, the status of components as well as various terminological and methodological meanderings of dividing the componential sphere. In spite of all the controversies, semantics has at last come to be preoccupied with what it should be; meanings are no longer observed - they are analyzed.

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LUBELSKIE MATERIAŁY NEOPILOLOGICZNE — 1982

Grzyżna Kryszcuk

Konstrukcje biernie w niemieckim tekście technicznym.

Konstrukcją charakterystyczną dla niemieckiego tekstu technicznego jest czas teraźniejszy strony biernej. Często występowanie tej formy ma szerególny wpływ na budowę zdania, ponieważ warunkuje pojawienie się dalszej liczby czasowników posłikowych i czasowników w formie nieodmiennej.

Skoro strona bierna jest szerególnie często używana w niemieckim tekście technicznym, co zostało potwierdzone badaniami statystycznymi, to należy zastanowić się, jakie cechy formy biernej są szczególnie przydatne dla języka, którym posługują się technicy.

Charakterystyczną i szerególną cechą strony biernej jest to, że sprawca czynności nie tylko nie jest wymieniany, lecz może zostać całkowicie wyeliminowany, np.

Das sind die Bestimmungseichte des räumlichen Spannungsstandes in jedem Punkte, um den das verschwindend kleine Volumenelement abgegrenzt worden ist.

/Są to zarazem wielkości określające dla przestworzonego stanu naprężenia w owym punkcie, wokół którego wydzielony został najmniejszy element objętości./

Durch die hindurch werden von einem Teil des Körpers zum anderen innere Kräfte übertragen.

/Na elementarne powierzchnie działają siły wewnętrzne./  
Działający /sprawca czynności/ jest tu zupełnie bez znaczenia, ponieważ nie ma on wpływu na zrozmienienie istoty procesu. Dlatego też możliwość strony biernej wyrażania czynności bez określenia sprawcy wykorzystywane są przede wszystkim w literaturze naukowej — technicznej, gdzie na plan pierwszy wysuwają się prawa rządzące techniką, a sprawca jest nawiązany na plan dalszy, np.