Reading Response: Vygotsky

A word's sense is the aggregate of all the psychological facts that arise in our consciousness as a result of the word.

In this reading response, I will analyze what senses are associated with words, how its meaning interacts with it, and how the different senses of words are applied in different contexts.

First, we define what senses are. Based on the quoted sentence, senses can be thought of as all the mental responses which come from speaking, listening, thinking, or otherwise using a word. In essence, it is the collection of all the *meanings* associated with a word. Here, I make a distinction between the meaning of a word and the meanings associated with a word. Meaning refers to concepts and ideas that humans conceive, reflect on, and communicate. The meaning of a word is its dictionary definition; the word can be replaced by its definition with little loss in most cases. It is also the most common use of a word. The meanings associated with a word can vary person to person, based on culture, experiences, context, and more. They are fluid; one can invoke the same word in the same situation, yet have different meanings associated with each use of the word. The sense of the word, then, is the accumulation of all meanings associated with it. This means that these meanings do not have to be clearly defined. In fact, they often give us a certain feeling or vague understanding that cannot be easily described with words. For example, the word "blue" refers to the colour of the sea. It can also refer to a feeling, which is extended to a genre of music. It is easier for one to understand what the genre of music is if one knows its relation to the *feeling* described by the word "blue". This imparts some "sense" of what the genre is, a sense that cannot be easily defined or described without loss of meaning.

Armed with this definition of sense, we can begin to analyze what sense are associated with words. Obviously, its definition is one of its senses. Then comes its metaphorical meaning. These can come naturally, for example, flowers are associated with beauty across cultures. In Taoism, water is associated with some sort of "goodness": it nourishes all without discrimination. Here, we can see that words describing nature can inherit characteristics of the things they define. Afterwards, there are artificial senses that come from tales or events, or are defined. The hammer and sickle representing communism was chosen because they were tools familiar to proletariats. We associate them with communism because they were essentially defined to be. The laurel is associated with victory because it was adopted by Apollo in the Greek myths. Some can also come from language construction. In English, we refer to ships with a grammatical "she", which gives it a feminine sense. In other langugages, where each noun has its own grammatical gender, inanimate object are given gender associations, as described in the text (the poem "the Fir and the Palm"). There are of courses more ways for sense to come associated with words. The biological function of the heart, and ancient medical knowledge resulted in us associating the heart

with emotions, especially love. Further discussion will have to be left to a later time, as listing all the ways senses come to be, if it is even possible, diverges us from the main topic at hand.

Here, I will discuss how a word's meaning interacts with its senses, and vice versa. In many cases, the senses of a word are so strong that they change the meaning of words themselves. In Chinese, the specific characters for the Yellow River and the Yangtze River came to be associated with all rivers, which is a logical continuation. Until recently, the colours blue and pink were associated with males and females respectively. However, it was not too long ago when blue was deemed a "female" colour, and pink a "male" colour. Societal and cultural changes affect the senses of colours, and their meanings. In fact, their senses are changing at this very moment, as societal forces dessociate colours and genders. This can also occur when cultures mix. The raven was associated with good in many Asian cultures, yet due to an intermingling of cultures, more have come to see it as a bad omen. In fact, in modern Japanese forms such as manga and anime, we see ravens come with bad luck. Although less often, the meaning of a word can also affect its sense. The word "nice" used to refer to ignorant people, and came with a negative sense. Nowadays, however, with its modern meaning, it almost always has a positive sense. Note that here we label senses as positive or negative based on their associated emotions and connotation.

Now, we analyze how the different senses of words are used in different ways. In verbal speech, we often use the senses of words as part of common phrases without even realising it. Words such as "heartless", or slang such as "roast" and "slay" are used mostly to express the senses behind them. To call someone heartless is not to say they are devoid of said organ, and "slay" is rarely used where actual slaying occurs. Then, we come to written speech, where we find more creative uses of speech. They are heavily used in literature, especially poetry, to invoke certain feelings, and to allow readers to have their own interpretation. For example, one might address a lover as a "flower". This can refer to their beauty, fragility, or even rarity. Depending on the context, all interpretations can be valid. This is exactly what the poet desires to achieve. Other than that, senses can be used simply as code words. Just as how one would speak in a foreign language for privacy, the senses of words can also be used so that listeners who do not share the same experiences or background cannot understand it, as they do not share the same sense.

In this brief response, I have defined in my own terms what a "sense" is, and how it interacts with the defintion of a word. This allows us to understand how the senses of words are used in daily life (I admit that more elaboration would be very useful for this part of the response).