1. Meanings of Meaning

Ogden and Richards and After

The word 'meaning' and its corresponding verb 'to mean' are among the most eminently discussable terms in the English language, and semanticists have often seemed to spend an immoderate amount of time puzzling out the 'meanings of *meaning*' as a supposedly necessary preliminary to the study of their subject. Perhaps the best-known book ever written on semantics, that which C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards published in 1923, had the very title *The Meaning of Meaning*, and contained, on pp. 186–7, a list of as many as twenty-two definitions of the word, taking different non-theoretical or theoretical starting points. Here, for interest's sake, is a selection of the meanings given:

an intrinsic property
the other words annexed to a word in the dictionary
the connotation of a word
the place of anything in a system
the practical consequences of a thing in our future experience
that to which the user of a symbol actually refers
that to which the user of a symbol ought to be referring
that to which the user of a symbol believes himself to be referring
that to which the interpreter of a symbol
(a) refers
(b) believes himself to be referring
(c) believes the user to be referring.

Ogden and Richards, presenting this list, tried to show how confusion and misunderstanding come about because of lack of agreement about such basic terms as *meaning*. But they looked forward to a day when (as a result of the education of the public through their book and by other channels) 'the Influence of Language upon Thought is understood, and the Phantoms due to linguistic misconception have been removed'; from here, the way would be open, they felt, 'to more fruitful methods of Interpretation and to an Art of Conversation by which the communicants can enjoy something more than the customary stones and scorpions'.

2 Semantics

The fascinating glimpse of a utopia of pure, polite conversation given us by Ogden and Richards is in part their own peculiar view of things, but other semanticists (notably those of the General Semantics movement inaugurated by Korzybski's *Science and Sanity* in 1933) have also seen the solution of problems of meaning, thought, and communication as a potential cure-all for the ills of modern society. Other investigators have also, like Ogden and Richards, looked towards science for the clarification of semantic concepts. Ogden and Richards, in 1923, felt confident enough in the progress of science to assert:

> During the last few years advances in biology, and the psychological investigation of memory and heredity, have placed the 'meaning' of signs in general beyond doubt, and it is here shown that thought and language are to be treated in the same manner. (p. 249)

Ten years later, Bloomfield, in *Language* (1933), the most influential book on language to be published between the wars, similarly hitched semantics to the onward march of science, but with a slightly different emphasis. It was not the scientific study of mental phenomena (thought and symbolization) that he saw as providing the semanticist's answers, but the scientific definition of everything to which language may refer:

> We can define the meaning of a speech-form accurately when this meaning has to do with some matter of which we possess scientific knowledge. We can define the names of minerals, for example, in terms of chemistry and mineralogy, as when we say that the ordinary meaning of the English word *salt* is 'sodium chloride (NaCl)', and we can define the names of plants or animals by means of the technical terms of botany or zoology, but we have no precise way of defining words like *love* or *hate*, which concern situations that have not been accurately classified – and these latter are in the great majority. (*Language*, p. 139)

Bloomfield, then, was less sanguine about the wonders of science than Ogden and Richards. His conclusion, not surprisingly, sounded a pessimistic note, which turned out to be the virtual death-knell of semantics in the U.S.A. for the next twenty years: 'The statement of meanings is therefore the weak point in language-study, and will remain so until human knowledge advances very far beyond its present state.' (p. 140).

Taken to its logical terminus, Bloomfield's argument implies a vision of an eventual period when everything would be capable of authoritative scientific definition, or in simpler words, when everything there was to be known would be known about everything – something even more illusory than Ogden's and Richards's idyll of a conversational paradise. Bloomfield was writing at a time when there was interest in the concept of 'unified science' – that is, in the idea that all sciences, from physics to psychology, could be cemented together into one vast monolith

of knowledge – but even allowing for this, his picture of the semanticist waiting patiently for the accumulation and solidification of the totality of human knowledge relies on what in hindsight is a naïve view of the nature of science. Three flaws were latent in Bloomfield's approach.

Firstly, at any given time, there are usually competing scientific accounts of the same phenomenon. Which of them do we choose for our definition?

In the second place, science does not progress in the manner of a tub filling up with water – it progresses by a continuing process of revision and clarification, leading to greater clarity and depth of understanding. Since scientific statements are by nature provisional, it is difficult to foresee a time when everyone would be sufficiently confident that no further significant reformulations would be forthcoming to be able to start safely defining words like *love* and *hate*.

Thirdly, a definition in terms of a scientific formula, such as *salt* = NaCl, simply exchanges one set of linguistic symbols for another, and so postpones the task of semantic explication one step further. Assuming that scientific language, like everyday language, has meaning, we are faced with the problem of defining the meaning of 'NaCl'; and if we could replace this with a more precise or informative scientific formula, the same problem would arise with that, and so on *ad infinitum*. In other words, Bloomfield's recipe for discovering meaning leads into a path of infinite regression; it turns out to be a dead end not only on practical but on logical grounds.

The problems of Ogden's and Richards's and Bloomfield's approaches to meaning arise mainly from the determination to explain semantics in terms of other scientific disciplines. One may argue that much of the apparent ambiguity of the term *meaning*, which bothered Ogden and Richards, has the same source. Certainly most of the twenty-two definitions given by them (as the examples on p. 1 above show) are the authors' wording of technical definitions of philosophers, psychologists, philologists, literary critics, and other specialists; and much of the conflict between these definitions is explicable in terms of each specialist's need or desire to tailor the study of meaning to the requirements of his own field. So a philosopher may define meaning, for his purposes, in terms of truth and falsehood; a behaviourist psychologist in terms of stimulus and response; a literary critic in terms of the reader's response; and so on. Naturally enough, their definitions, springing from diverse frames of reference, will have little in common.

While admitting that study in related fields could provide insight for the student of semantics, many people will wonder why semantics need be considered dependent, in this way, on extrinsic considerations. In fact,

as soon as we start to treat semantics as deserving its own frame of reference instead of having to borrow one from elsewhere, we dispel many of the difficulties that have beset its development in the past fifty years. An autonomous discipline begins not with answers, but with questions. We might say that the whole point of setting up a theory of semantics is to provide a 'definition' of *meaning* – that is, a systematic account of the nature of meaning. To demand a definition of *meaning* before we started discussing the subject would simply be to insist on treating certain other concepts, e.g. stimulus and response, as in some sense more basic and more important. A physicist does not have to define notions like 'time', 'heat', 'colour', 'atom' before he starts investigating their properties. Rather, definitions, if they are needed, emerge from the study itself.

Once this commonplace is accepted, the question of how to define *meaning*, which so preoccupied Ogden and Richards, is seen in its true colour as a red herring.

A Linguistic Starting Point for Semantics

So far I have been trying to clear the ground, by arguing that the study of meaning should be free from subservience to other disciplines. This leads naturally to the challenge: 'How then should meaning be studied? What sort of questions should we be trying to answer in setting up a theory of meaning? What principles should form its foundations?'

One of the keynotes of a modern linguistic approach to semantics is that there is no escape from language: an equation such as *cent* = *hundredth of a dollar* or *salt* = *NaCl* is not a matching of a linguistic sign with something outside language; it is a correspondence between two linguistic expressions, supposedly having 'the same meaning'. The search for an explanation of linguistic phenomena in terms of what is not language is as vain as the search for an exit from a room which has no doors or windows, for the word 'explanation' itself implies a statement in language. Our remedy, then, is to be content with exploring what we have inside the room: to study relations *within* language, such as paraphrase or synonymy (both terms meaning roughly 'sameness of meaning'). Paraphrase, and some other relations of meaning capable of systematic study, are illustrated below. *Entailment* and *presupposition* are types of meaning-dependence holding between one utterance and another; *logical inconsistency* is a type of semantic *contrastiveness* between utterances.

1. *X*: The defects of the plan were obvious
   IS A PARAPHRASE OF *Y*: The demerits of the scheme were evident.

2. *X*: The earth goes round the sun
   ENTAILS *Y*: The earth moves.
3. *X*: John's son is called Marcus
   PRESUPPOSES *Y*: John has a son.
4. *X*: The earth goes round the sun
   IS INCONSISTENT WITH *Y*: The earth is stationary.

These are some of the relations of meaning between two utterances *X* and *Y* that a semantic theory may profitably try to explain; we shall look at these, and other, relations of meaning more carefully later on (pp. 73–82).

A second principle underlying many present-day linguistic approaches to semantics is seeing the task of language study as the explication of the LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE of the native speaker of a language; that is, the provision of rules and structures which specify the mental apparatus a person must possess if he is to 'know' a given language. Applied to the semantic end of language, this leads to the question 'What is it to *know* the meaning of a word, a sentence, etc.?' rather than just 'What is meaning?'. And among the evidence for such knowledge one may include recognizing semantic relations such as 1–4 above.

Another type of evidence that a person knows the semantics of a language is his recognition that certain utterances or expressions, although they obey the grammatical rules of the language concerned, are 'unsemantic' in the sense that they are aberrant or odd from the point of view of meaning. One such oddity is a TAUTOLOGY, or a statement which has to be true by virtue of its meaning alone, such as:

Monday came before the day which followed it.

We rarely have occasion to make such statements, because (except where we are explaining an unfamiliar linguistic usage) they tell a listener nothing that he did not know before, and so are communicatively empty. At the opposite side of acceptability are CONTRADICTIONS, or statements which are, by virtue of meaning, necessarily false:

Everything I like I dislike.
My brother had the toothache in his toe.

These are more decidedly deviant than tautologies: they are not just informationally vacuous, but are downright nonsensical. Modern linguistics has concentrated, in defining what a given language is, on specifying which sentences are acceptable within that language, and which are not – that is, on marking the boundaries between what is possible and impossible within the rules of the language. This has naturally brought into focus the native speaker's ability to discriminate between

'grammatical' and 'ungrammatical' sentences, and it is this ability in the area of meaning that we appeal to if we say that an ability to distinguish semantically odd sentences from meaningful sentences is a manifestation of his knowledge of rules of meaning in his language.

Semantically odd or deviant sentences are not restricted to contradictions and tautologies. There are, for example, questions which logically permit only one answer (*yes* or *no*), and so do not need to be asked: *Has your mother any sons or daughters?* There are also sentences which are unanswerable, because they have absurd presuppositions: *Do you know how the man who killed his widow was punished?* This sort of whimsicality is a reminder of the 'tangle-talk' or nonsense rigmaroles which children indulge in as a kind of verbal sport:

> I went to the pictures tomorrow
> I took a front seat at the back
> I fell from the pit to the gallery
> And broke a front bone in my back.
> A lady she gave me some chocolate,
> I ate it and gave it her back;
> I phoned for a taxi and walked it,
> And that's why I never came back.
>
> (Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren*, p. 25)

The natural fascination children find in beating the bounds of meaningfulness might be counted among the symptoms of that 'intuitive grasp' of meaning, or SEMANTIC COMPETENCE as the linguist would call it, shared by the speakers of a language.

Language and the 'Real World'

But for the linguist, as for the philosopher, a crucial difficulty lies in drawing a boundary not simply between sense and nonsense, but between the kind of nonsense which arises from contradicting what we know about language and meaning, and the kind of nonsense which comes from contradicting what we know about the 'real world'. If a speaker of English is asked to comment on the utterance

(1) My uncle always sleeps standing on one toe

he might exclaim: 'But that can't be true! No one can sleep like that!' His response would be similar to what he might say if faced with the contradiction

(2) My uncle always sleeps awake.

But on reflection, he would probably explain the two absurdities

differently. Sentence (1) would be unbelievable because of what he knows about the world we live in, more specifically about the posture in which sleep is possible. Sentence (2) would be more than unbelievable – it would point to the unimaginable, because of the contradiction between the two meanings of *sleep* and *awake*. But both statements would strike him as absurd in the same way, to the extent that they would both be necessarily false.

An analogy can be drawn here between the rules of a language and the rules of a game. Events within a football match, for instance, may be impossible (a) because they are against the rules of the game, or (b) because they violate natural laws regarding physical strength of human beings, the inability of footballs to defy ordinary laws of motion (e.g. by moving in the air like boomerangs), etc. Thus a football report that 'The centre-forward scored a goal by heading a ball from his own goal-line' would be disbelieved as physically impossible, while 'The centre-forward scored a goal by punching the ball into the goal-mouth' would be disbelieved on the grounds that if such a thing happened, the game could not have been football.

The difference felt between (1) and (2) above is brought out in the different strategies we adopt in trying to make sense of them. It seems to be an incontrovertible principle of semantics that the human mind abhors a vacuum of sense; so a speaker of English faced with absurd sentences will strain his interpretative faculty to the utmost to read them meaningfully. For (1), *My uncle always sleeps standing on one toe*, two strategies of interpretation seem possible. The first is to assume a TRANSFER OF MEANING by which either *sleeps* or *standing on one toe* is understood in a new or unusual sense. *Standing on one toe*, for instance, might be taken as a hyperbole or exaggerated substitute for 'topsy-turvy', or 'in a weird posture'. The second strategy is to imagine some miraculous, unprecedented situation (e.g. the uncle's having subjected himself to training in a hitherto unpractised version of yoga) in which this statement might be true. For (2) *My uncle always sleeps awake*, however, only the first strategy of transfer of meaning can be applied: the solution here must be to resolve the semantic conflict between 'sleeping' and 'waking' by (for example) understanding *sleeps* in a metaphorical way as 'behaves as if asleep'. A factual absurdity can be made sensible by extending one's imagination to the conception of a possible world (perhaps a dream world or fictional world) in which it could be true. A logical contradiction is on the other hand a linguistic absurdity, which, if it is to be made meaningful, requires a linguistic remedy, a 'tampering with the rules of the language game', just as the impossible manoeuvre described under (b) above would require a rewriting of the rules of football.

The distinction between language (including 'logic') on the one hand, and factual or 'real world' knowledge on the other, will be explored further in Chapter 2 (pp. 12–13), and in Chapter 11 we shall also investigate the notion of transfer of meaning, and see in what sense it amounts to a 'tampering with language'. At this stage, let us simply note that such a distinction is felt to exist, but that it is not easy for a linguist or a philosopher to justify it, or to prescribe how to draw a line in individual cases. Nevertheless, practical considerations, if no others, compel us to make such a distinction, for to do otherwise would be to enlarge the domain of semantics (as Bloomfield by implication enlarged it) into the impossibly vast study of everything that is to be known about the universe in which we live. We shall look at this distinction more critically in Chapter 5 (pp. 82–6).

Summary

In this chapter I have tried to make three main points about the study of meaning:

1. That it is mistaken to try to define meaning by reducing it to the terms of sciences other than the science of language: e.g. to the terms of psychology or chemistry.

2. That meaning can best be studied as a linguistic phenomenon in its own right, not as something 'outside language'. This means we investigate what it is to 'know a language' semantically, e.g. to know what is involved in recognizing relations of meaning between sentences, and in recognizing which sentences are meaningful and which are not.

3. That point (2) rests on a distinction between 'knowledge of language' and 'knowledge of the "real world" '.

2. Seven Types of Meaning

Some people would like semantics to pursue the study of meaning in a wide sense of 'all that is communicated by language'; others (among them many modern writers within the framework of general linguistics) limit it in practice to the study of logical or conceptual meaning in the sense discussed in Chapter 1. Semantics in the former, wider sense can lead us once again into the void from which Bloomfield retreated with understandable misgivings – the description of all that may be the object of human knowledge or belief. On the other hand, we can, by carefully distinguishing types of meaning, show how they all fit into the total composite effect of linguistic communication, and show how methods of study appropriate to one type may not be appropriate to another.

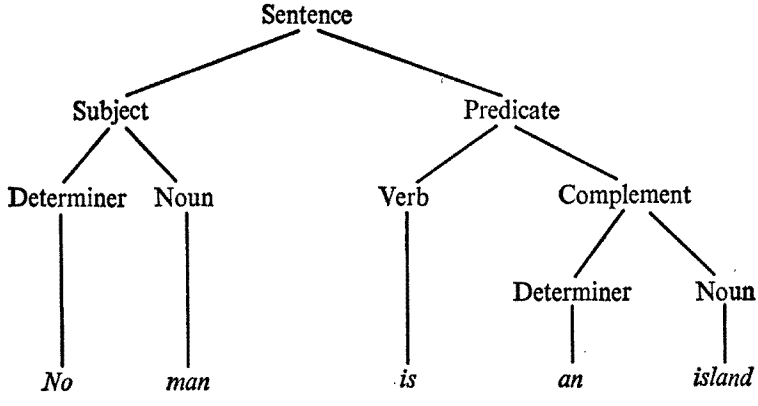
On this basis, I shall break down 'meaning' in its widest sense into seven different ingredients, giving primary importance to logical meaning or (as I shall prefer to call it) CONCEPTUAL MEANING, the type of meaning I was discussing earlier in connection with 'semantic competence'. The six other types I shall consider are connotative meaning, social meaning, affective meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning, and thematic meaning.

Conceptual Meaning

CONCEPTUAL MEANING (sometimes called 'denotative' or 'cognitive' meaning) is widely assumed to be the central factor in linguistic communication, and I think it can be shown to be integral to the essential functioning of language in a way that other types of meaning are not (which is not to say that conceptual meaning is the most important element of every act of linguistic communication). My chief reason for assigning priority to conceptual meaning is that it has a complex and sophisticated organization of a kind which may be compared with, and cross-related to, similar organization on the syntactic and phonological levels of language. In particular, I would like to point to two structural principles that seem to lie at the basis of all linguistic patterning: the principle of CONTRASTIVENESS and the principle of STRUCTURE. Contrastive features underlie the classification of sounds in phonology,

for example, in that any label we apply to a sound defines it *positively*, by what features it possesses, and also by implication *negatively*, by what features it does not possess. Thus the phonetic symbol /b/ may be explicated as representing a bundle of contrastive features + bilabial, + voice, + stop, − nasal; the assumption being that the distinctive sounds or phonemes of a language are identifiable in terms of binary, or largely binary, contrasts. In a similar way, the conceptual meanings of a language can be studied in terms of contrastive features, so that (for example) the meaning of the word *woman* could be specified as + HUMAN, − MALE, + ADULT, as distinct from, say, *boy*, which could be 'defined' + HUMAN, + MALE, − ADULT (see p. 90).

The second principle, that of structure, is the principle by which larger linguistic units are built up out of smaller units; or (looking at it from the opposite point of view) by which we are able to analyse a sentence syntactically into its constituent parts, moving from its *immediate constituents* through a hierarchy of sub-division to its *ultimate constituents* or smallest syntactic elements. This aspect of the organization of language is often given visual display in a tree-diagram:



Or it can be represented by bracketing:

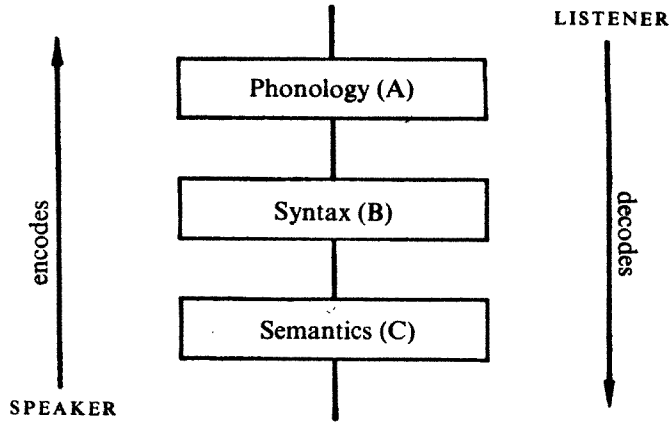
{(No) (man)}{[(is)][(an) (island)]}

It has long been taken for granted that the syntax of a language is to be handled in such terms. But it is now also widely accepted that the semantics of natural language has its own counterpart of syntactic structure, or (to use in many ways a closer analogy) of the systems of symbolic logic devised by mathematicians and philosophers (see Chapters 8 and 9).

The two principles of contrastiveness and constituent structure represent the way language is organized respectively on what linguists have

termed the PARADIGMATIC (or selectional) and SYNTAGMATIC (or combinatory) axes of linguistic structure. It will be my main aim in the latter part of this book (Chapters 6–17) to explore as fully as I can the application of these principles to semantic analysis, and so to show how methods of study devised for other levels of language can bring precision and insight to conceptual semantics.

In this discussion, I have taken for granted a third generally acknowledged principle of linguistic organization, which is that any given piece of language is structured simultaneously on more than one 'level'. At least the three following levels, in the pictured order, seem to be necessary for a full account of the linguistic competence by which we are able to generate or understand linguistic utterances:



And this means that for the analysis of any sentence, we need to establish a 'phonological representation', a 'syntactic representation' and a 'semantic representation', and the stages by which one level of representation can be derived from another. The aim of conceptual semantics is to provide, for any given interpretation of a sentence, a configuration of abstract symbols which is its 'semantic representation', and which shows exactly what we need to know if we are to distinguish that meaning from all other possible sentence meanings in the language, and to match that meaning with the right syntactic and phonological expression. The ability to match levels operates in one direction (A→B→C on the diagram) if we are DECODING, i.e. listening to a sentence and interpreting it; and in the opposite direction (C→B→A) if we are ENCODING, i.e. composing and speaking a sentence. From this account it will be clear that conceptual meaning is an inextricable and essential part of what language is, such that one can scarcely define

language without referring to it. A 'language' which communicated by other means than by conceptual meaning (e.g. a 'language' which communicated solely by means of expletive words like *Oh! Ah! Oho! Alas!* and *Tally ho!*) would not be a language at all in the sense in which we apply that term to the tongues of men.

Connotative Meaning

More of what is distinctive about conceptual meaning will appear when we contrast it with CONNOTATIVE MEANING. Connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it *refers to*, over and above its purely conceptual content. To a large extent, the notion of 'reference' overlaps with conceptual meaning. If the word *woman* is defined conceptually by three features (+ HUMAN, − MALE, + ADULT), then the three properties 'human', 'adult', and 'female' must provide a criterion of the correct use of that word. These contrastive features, translated into 'real world' terms, become attributes of the referent (that which the word refers to). But there is a multitude of additional, non-criterial properties that we have learnt to expect a referent of *woman* to possess. They include not only physical characteristics ('biped', 'having a womb'), but also psychological and social properties ('gregarious', 'subject to maternal instinct'), and may extend to features which are merely *typical* rather than *invariable* concomitants of womanhood ('capable of speech', 'experienced in cookery', 'skirt-or-dress-wearing'). Still further, connotative meaning can embrace the 'putative properties' of the referent, due to the viewpoint adopted by an individual, or a group of people or a whole society. So in the past woman has been burdened with such attributes ('frail', 'prone to tears', 'cowardly', 'emotional', 'irrational', 'inconstant') as the dominant male has been pleased to impose on her, as well as with more becoming qualities such as 'gentle', 'compassionate', 'sensitive', 'hard-working'. Obviously, connotations are apt to vary from age to age and from society to society. A hundred years ago, 'non-trouser-wearing' must have seemed a thoroughly definitive connotation of the word *woman* and its translation equivalents in European languages, just as in many non-western societies today womankind is associated with attributes foreign to our own way of thinking. It is equally obvious that connotations will vary, to some extent, from individual to individual within the same speech community: to an English-speaking misogynist *woman* will have many uncomplimentary associations not present in the minds of speakers of a more feminist persuasion.

It will be clear that in talking about connotation, I am in fact talking

about the 'real world' experience one associates with an expression when one uses or hears it. Therefore the boundary between conceptual and connotative meaning is coincident with that nebulous but crucial distinction, discussed in Chapter 1, between 'language' and the 'real world'. This accounts for the feeling that connotation is somehow incidental to language rather than an essential part of it, and we may notice, in confirmation, that connotative meaning is not specific to language, but is shared by other communicative systems, such as visual art and music. Whatever connotations the word *baby* has can be conjured up (more effectively, because the medium is directly representational) by a drawing of a baby, or an imitation of a baby's cry. The overlap between linguistic and visual connotations is particularly noticeable in advertising, where words are often the lesser partners of illustrations in the task of conferring on a product a halo of favourable associations.

A second fact which indicates that connotative meaning is peripheral compared with conceptual meaning is that connotations are relatively unstable: that is, they vary considerably, as we have seen, according to culture, historical period, and the experience of the individual. Although it is too simple to suggest that all speakers of a particular language speak exactly 'the same language', it can be assumed, as a principle without which communication through that language would not be possible, that on the whole they share the same conceptual framework, just as they share approximately the same syntax. In fact, some recent semanticists have assumed that the same basic conceptual framework is common to all languages, and is a universal property of the human mind (see pp. 26–30).

Thirdly, connotative meaning is indeterminate and open-ended in a sense in which conceptual meaning is not. Connotative meaning is open-ended in the same way as our knowledge and beliefs about the universe are open-ended: any characteristic of the referent, identified subjectively or objectively, may contribute to the connotative meaning of the expression which denotes it. In contrast, it is generally taken as fundamental to semantic theory that the conceptual meaning of a word or sentence can be codified in terms of a limited set of symbols (e.g. in the form of a finite set of discrete features of meaning), and that the semantic representation of a sentence can be specified by means of a finite number of rules. This postulate of the finiteness and determinateness of conceptual content is modelled on the assumptions that linguists generally make when analysing other aspects of linguistic structure. Such assumptions are to some extent over-simplified, but without them it would be difficult to uphold the view of language as a finite and coherent system.

Social and Affective Meaning

We turn now to two aspects of communication which have to do with the situation in which an utterance takes place. SOCIAL MEANING is that which a piece of language conveys about the social circumstances of its use. In part, we 'decode' the social meaning of a text through our recognition of different dimensions and levels of style within the same language. We recognize some words or pronunciations as being dialectal, i.e. as telling us something of the geographical or social origin of the speaker; other features of language tell us something of the social relationship between the speaker and hearer: we have a scale of 'status' usage, for example, descending from formal and literary English at one end to colloquial, familiar, and eventually slang English at the other.

One account (Crystal and Davy, *Investigating English Style*) has recognized, among others, the following dimensions of socio-stylistic variation (I have added examples of the categories of usage one would distinguish on each dimension):

Variation according to:

DIALECT (The language of a geographical region or of a social class)
TIME (The language of the eighteenth century, etc.)
PROVINCE (Language of law, of science, of advertising, etc.)
STATUS (Polite, colloquial, slang, etc., language)
MODALITY (Language of memoranda, lectures, jokes, etc.)
SINGULARITY (The style of Dickens, of Hemingway, etc.)

Although not exhaustive, this list indicates something of the range of style differentiation possible within a single language. It is not surprising, perhaps, that we rarely find words which have both the same conceptual meaning and the same stylistic meaning. This observation has frequently led people to declare that 'true synonyms do not exist'. If we understand synonymy as complete equivalence of communicative effect, it is indeed hard to find an example that will disprove this statement. But there is much convenience in restricting the term 'synonymy' to equivalence of conceptual meaning, so that we may then contrast conceptual synonyms with respect to their varying stylistic overtones:

steed (poetic)	domicile (very formal, official)
horse (general)	residence (formal)
nag (slang)	abode (poetic)
gee-gee (baby language)	home (general)

cast (literary, biblical)	diminutive (very formal)
throw (general)	tiny (colloquial)
chuck (casual, slang)	wee (colloquial, dialectal)

The style dimension of 'status' is particularly important in distinguishing synonymous expressions. Here is an example in which the difference of status is maintained through a whole sentence, and is reflected in syntax as well as in vocabulary:

(1) They chucked a stone at the cops, and then did a bunk with the loot.
(2) After casting a stone at the police, they absconded with the money.

Sentence (1) could be said by two criminals, talking casually about the crime afterwards; sentence (2) might be said by the chief inspector in making his official report. Both could be describing the same happening, and their common ground of conceptual meaning is evident in the difficulty anyone would have in assenting to the truth of one of these sentences, and denying the truth of the other.

In a more local sense, social meaning can include what has been called the ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE of an utterance (see pp. 321–3): for example, whether it is to be interpreted as a request, an assertion, an apology, a threat, etc. The function an utterance performs in this respect may be only indirectly related to its conceptual meaning. The sentence *I haven't got a knife* has the form and meaning of an assertion, and yet in social reality (e.g. if said to the waiter in a restaurant) it can readily take on the force of a request such as 'Please bring me a knife'.

From this it is only a small step to the consideration of how language reflects the personal feelings of the speaker, including his attitude to the listener, or his attitude to something he is talking about. AFFECTIVE MEANING, as this sort of meaning can be called, is often explicitly conveyed through the conceptual or connotative content of the words used. Someone who is addressed: 'You're a vicious tyrant and a villainous reprobate, and I hate you for it!' is left in little doubt as to the feelings of the speaker towards him. But there are less direct ways of disclosing our attitude than this: for example, by scaling our remarks according to politeness. With the object of getting people to be quiet, we might say either:

(3) I'm terribly sorry to interrupt, but I wonder if you would be so kind as to lower your voices a little.

or:

(4) Will you belt up.

Factors such as intonation and voice-timbre – what we often refer to as 'tone of voice' – are also important here. The impression of politeness in (3) can be reversed by a tone of biting sarcasm; sentence (4) can be turned into a playful remark between intimates if delivered with the intonation of a mild request.

Affective meaning is largely a parasitic category in the sense that to express our emotions we rely upon the mediation of other categories of meaning – conceptual, connotative, or stylistic. Emotional expression through style comes about, for instance, when we adopt an impolite tone to express displeasure (as in (4) above), or when we adopt a casual tone to express friendliness. On the other hand, there are elements of language (chiefly interjections, like *Aha!* and *Yippee!*) whose chief function is to express emotion. When we use these, we communicate feelings and attitudes without the mediation of any other kind of semantic function.

Reflected and Collocative Meaning

Two further, though less important types of meaning involve an interconnection on the lexical level of language.

First, REFLECTED MEANING is the meaning which arises in cases of multiple conceptual meaning, when one sense of a word forms part of our response to another sense. On hearing, in a church service, the synonymous expressions *The Comforter* and *The Holy Ghost*, both referring to the Third Person of the Trinity, I find my reactions to these terms conditioned by the everyday non-religious meanings of *comfort* and *ghost*. *The Comforter* sounds warm and 'comforting' (although in the religious context, it means 'the strengthener or supporter'), while *The Holy Ghost* sounds awesome.

One sense of a word seems to 'rub off' on another sense in this way only when it has a dominant suggestive power either through relative frequency and familiarity (as in the case of *The Holy Ghost*) or through the strength of its associations. Only in poetry, which invites a heightened sensitivity to language in all respects, do we find reflected meaning operating in less obviously favourable circumstances:

> Are limbs, so *dear*-achieved, are sides,
> Full-nerved – still warm – too hard to stir?

In these lines from *Futility*, a poem on a dead soldier, Wilfred Owen overtly uses the word *dear* in the sense 'expensive(ly)', but also alludes, one feels in the context of the poem, to the sense 'beloved'.

The case where reflected meaning intrudes through the sheer strength of emotive suggestion is most strikingly illustrated by words which have

a taboo meaning. Since their popularization in senses connected with the physiology of sex, it has become increasingly difficult to use terms like *intercourse*, *ejaculation*, and *erection* in 'innocent' senses without conjuring up their sexual associations. This process of taboo contamination has accounted in the past for the dying-out of the non-taboo sense of a word: Bloomfield explained the replacement of *cock* in its farmyard sense by *rooster* as due to the influence of the taboo use of the former word, and one wonders if *intercourse* is now following a similar path.

COLLOCATIVE MEANING consists of the associations a word acquires on account of the meanings of words which tend to occur in its environment. *Pretty* and *handsome* share common ground in the meaning 'good-looking', but may be distinguished by the range of nouns with which they are likely to co-occur or (to use the linguist's term) collocate:

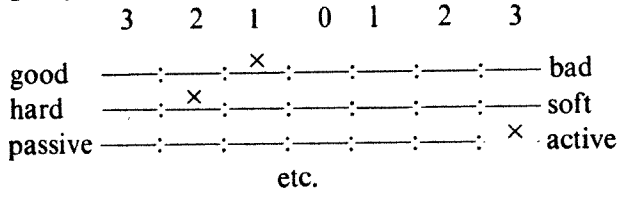
pretty	handsome
girl	boy
boy	man
woman	car
flower	vessel
garden	overcoat
colour	airliner
village	typewriter
etc.	etc.

The ranges may well, of course, overlap: *handsome woman* and *pretty woman* are both acceptable, although they suggest a different kind of attractiveness because of the collocative associations of the two adjectives. Further examples are quasi-synonymous verbs such as *wander* and *stroll* (*cows* may *wander*, but may not *stroll*) or *tremble* and *quiver* (one *trembles* with *fear*, but *quivers* with *excitement*). Not all differences in potential co-occurrence need to be explained as collocative meaning: some may be due to stylistic differences, others to conceptual differences. It is the incongruity of combining unlike styles that makes 'He *mounted* his *gee-gee*' or 'He *got on* his *steed*' an improbable combination. On the other hand, the acceptability of 'The donkey *ate hay*', as opposed to 'The donkey *ate silence*', is a matter of compatibility on the level of conceptual semantics (on such 'selection restrictions', see pp. 137–42). Only when explanation in terms of other categories of meaning does not apply do we need to invoke the special category of collocative meaning: on the other levels, generalizations can be made, while collocative meaning is simply an idiosyncratic property of individual words.

Associative Meaning: a Summary Term

Reflected meaning and collocative meaning, affective meaning and social meaning: all these have more in common with connotative meaning than with conceptual meaning; they all have the same open-ended, variable character, and lend themselves to analysis in terms of scales or ranges, rather than in discrete either-this-or-that terms. They can all be brought together under the heading of ASSOCIATIVE MEANING, and to explain communication on these levels, we need employ nothing more sophisticated than an elementary 'associationist' theory of mental connections based upon contiguities of experience. We contrast them all with conceptual meaning, because conceptual meaning seems to require the postulation of intricate mental structures which are specific to language and to the human species.

Associative meaning contains so many imponderable factors that it can be studied systematically only by approximative statistical techniques. In effect, Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum proposed a method for a partial analysis of associative meaning when they published their ambitiously titled book *The Measurement of Meaning* in 1957. Osgood and his co-authors devised a technique (involving a statistical measurement device, the Semantic Differential) for plotting meaning in terms of a multi-dimensional semantic space, using as data speakers' judgements recorded in terms of seven-point scales. The scales are labelled by contrasting adjective pairs, such as *happy–sad*, *hard–soft*, *slow–fast*, so that a person may, for example, record his impression of the word *bagpipe* on a form in the following way:



Statistically, the investigators found that particular significance seemed to lie in three major dimensions, those of evaluation (*good–bad*), potency (*hard–soft*), and activity (*active–passive*). It is clear, even from this very brief sketch, that the method can provide no more than a *partial* and *approximate* account of associative meaning: *partial* because it entails a selection from indefinitely many possible scales, which in any case would only provide for associative meaning in so far as it is explicable in scalar terms; *approximate* because of the statistical sampling, and because a seven-point scale constitutes a cutting-up of a continuous scale

into seven segments within which no differentiation is made – a process similar in its crudity to that of cutting up the spectrum into seven primary colours. This is not to disparage the Semantic Differential technique as a means of quantifying associative meaning: the lesson to be learned is, in fact, that it is only by such relatively insensitive tools as this that associative meaning can be systematically studied: it does not lend itself to determinate analyses involving yes–no choices and structures of uniquely segmentable elements.

Another important observation about the Semantic Differential is that it has been found useful in psychological fields such as personality studies, 'attitude measurement', and psychotherapy, where differences in the reactions of individuals are under scrutiny, rather than the common core of reactions that they share. This upholds what I said earlier in particular reference to connotative meaning: that whereas conceptual meaning is substantially part of the 'common system' of language shared by members of a speech community, associative meaning is less stable, and varies with the individual's experience.

Thematic Meaning

The final category of meaning I shall attempt to distinguish is THEMATIC MEANING, or what is communicated by the way in which a speaker or writer organizes the message, in terms of ordering, focus, and emphasis. It is often felt, for example, that an active sentence such as (1) has a different meaning from its passive equivalent (2), although in conceptual content they seem to be the same:

(1) Mrs Bessie Smith donated the first prize.
(2) The first prize was donated by Mrs Bessie Smith.

Certainly these have different communicative values in that they suggest different contexts: the active sentence seems to answer an implicit question 'What did Mrs Bessie Smith donate?', while the passive sentence seems to answer an implicit question 'Who was the first prize donated by?' or (more simply) 'Who donated the first prize?'. That is, (1), in contrast to (2), suggests that we know who Mrs Bessie Smith is (perhaps through a previous mention). The same truth conditions, however, apply to each: it would be impossible to find a situation of which (1) was an accurate report while (2) was not, or vice versa.

Thematic meaning is mainly a matter of choice between alternative grammatical construction, as in:

(3) A man is waiting in the hall.
(4) There's a man waiting in the hall.

(5) They stopped at the end of the corridor.
(6) At the end of the corridor, they stopped

(7) I like Danish cheese best.
(8) Danish cheese I like best.
(9) It's Danish cheese that I like best.

But the kind of contrast by ordering and emphasis illustrated by (1) and (2) can also be contrived by lexical means: by substituting (for example) *belongs to* for *owns*:

(10) My brother owns the largest betting-shop in London.
(11) The largest betting-shop in London belongs to my brother.

In other cases, it is stress and intonation rather than grammatical construction that highlights information in one part of a sentence. If the word *electric* is given contrastive stress in (12):

(12) Bill uses an *electric* razor.
(13) The kind of razor that Bill uses is an electric one.

the effect is to focus attention on that word as containing new information, against a background of what is already assumed to be known (viz. that Bill uses a razor). This kind of emphasis could have been equally achieved in English by the different syntactic construction of (13). The sentences bracketed together above obviously have, in a sense, 'the same meaning'; but all the same, we need to acknowledge that their communicative value may be somewhat different; they will not each be equally appropriate within the same context.

Demarcation Problems

I have now dealt with the seven types of meaning promised at the beginning of the chapter, but I do not wish to give the impression that this is a complete catalogue, accounting for all that a piece of language may communicate. One might, for example, have added a category for the physiological information conveyed by an act of speech or writing: information about the sex of the speaker, his age, the state of his sinuses, and so on.

A further caveat about the seven types of meaning: there are always problems of 'demarcation', and more especially, problems of separating conceptual meaning from the more peripheral categories. The difficulty of delimiting conceptual from connotative meaning, noted earlier, is paralleled in other borderline areas, such as that between conceptual meaning and socio-stylistic meaning:

(1) He *stuck* the key in his pocket.
(2) He *put* the key in his pocket.

We could argue that (1) and (2) are conceptually synonymous, and that the difference between the two is a matter of style (sentence (2) is neutral, while (1) is colloquial and casual). On the other hand, we could maintain that the shift in style is combined with a conceptual difference: that *stick* in a context such as (1) has a more precise denotation than (2) and could be roughly defined as 'to put carelessly and quickly'. There is support for the second explanation in the slight oddity of the following sentences:

?*He stuck the key slowly in his pocket.
?*He stuck the key carefully in his pocket.

[The preceding asterisk, according to a convention of linguistics, signals the unacceptability of a sentence.]

Often, in fact, the solution to a problem of delimitation is to conclude that quasi-synonyms differ on at least two planes of meaning.

As a second illustration, we may take a case on the border between conceptual and collocative meaning, that of the verbs *smile* and *grin*. Do these words have different conceptual meanings, or is it just that the range of expressions with which they habitually combine is different? Few would hesitate over which of the two words to insert in:

The duchess ——ed graciously as she shook hands with her guests.
Gargoyles ——ed hideously from the walls of the building.

But the question is whether such differences in collocation spring from different conceptual and connotative content: whether, for example, a *grin* can be defined as a broader, toothier and more potentially hostile expression than a *smile*, and is more likely to be found on the face of a gargoyle than that of a duchess for that very reason. This is a particularly complex case in that differences of social and affective meaning are also clearly implicated. In fact, as already observed, affective meaning is a category which overlaps heavily with style, connotation, and conceptual content.

Intended and Interpreted Meaning

It may be wondered why I have avoided making a distinction between the INTENDED meaning, that which is in the mind of the speaker when he is framing his message, and the INTERPRETED meaning, or that which is conveyed to the mind of the listener when he receives the message. I have equated meaning in its broad sense with 'communicative effect',

and 'communication' usually means transfer of information from a source (A) to a target (B). On this basis, one might argue that communication has only taken place if we know that what was in mind (A) has been transferred to, or copied in, mind (B). It is natural, then, that studies of meaning (particularly in philosophy) should have devoted much attention to the vexed question of the relation between meaning, intention, and interpretation. In spite of this, a linguist may feel entitled to ignore the difference between the intention of a message and its effect, because he is interested in studying the communication system itself, rather than what use or misuse is made of it. He is interested in studying the semantic aspect of the language which we may assume to be common to the minds of (A) and (B), and this includes, incidentally, studying ambiguities and other aspects of language (e.g. variability of associative meaning) which give scope for miscommunication. But the important point is that meaning, for semantics, is neutral between 'speaker's meaning' and 'hearer's meaning'; and this is surely justifiable, since only through knowing the neutral potentialities of the medium of communication itself can we investigate differences between what a person intends to convey and what he actually conveys.

All normal use of language, of course, implies some intention on the part of the speaker; but in so far as meaning implies an intention, the intention is only recoverable from the meaning itself. In other words, intentions are private but meaning is public. This applies even to social meaning: a matter to which I shall return in Chapter 16, in discussing the relation between semantics and pragmatics.

Summary

As this chapter has introduced quite a range of terms for types of meaning, it is fitting that it should end with a summary, and a suggestion or two for simplifying terminology:

SEVEN TYPES OF MEANING

	1. CONCEPTUAL MEANING or *Sense*		Logical, cognitive, or denotative content.
	ASSOCIATIVE MEANING	2. CONNOTATIVE MEANING	What is communicated by virtue of what language refers to.
		3. SOCIAL MEANING	What is communicated of the social circumstances of language use.
		4. AFFECTIVE MEANING	What is communicated of the feelings and attitudes of the speaker/writer.
		5. REFLECTED MEANING	What is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression.
		6. COLLOCATIVE MEANING	What is communicated through association with words which tend to occur in the environment of another word.
	7. THEMATIC MEANING		What is communicated by the way in which the message is organized in terms of order and emphasis.

I have here used SENSE as a briefer term for 'conceptual meaning', (or 'meaning' in the narrower sense), and will feel free to use it for clarity and convenience from now on. For 'meaning' in the wider sense which embraces all seven types listed, it is useful to have the alternative term COMMUNICATIVE VALUE.