SEMANTIC THEORY

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Edited by Roger Wright

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SEMANTIC THEORY
Towards a Modern Semantics

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and
edited by Roger Wright

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TOWARDS A MODERN SEMANTICS

Preface to the
English Edition

Writing an introduction to the study of modern semantics is bound to be a brave enterprise, since hardly any other branch of linguistics has developed as much in the last thirty years; furthermore, studies undertaken have had very different orientations, from a methodological viewpoint; thus it is impossible to synthesize all these different trends and perspectives in a unified way, without doing an injustice to some of them. I have not even tried to do this; I am thus exposing myself to a charge of one-sidedness, although I can justify myself by the use of the indefinite article in the title. The kind of semantics I am dealing with is paradigmatic; it is, in my opinion, syntagmatically verifiable, and in no way contradicts syntagmatic semantics; yet even within these chosen limits, there is a bias determined by my own evolution. I deliberately intended the word *towards* in the subtitle to be ambiguous: it should be understood at the same time from a historical evolutionary viewpoint (from Ullmann to Heger, from the triangle to the trapezium; from my 1957 study on *Semasiology* — which I would today call *Semantics* — to my present viewpoint) and from a methodological point of view (in the sense of a progressive refining of the methods towards more complex models); for this reason, this study should be considered as an introduction to the evolution of the subject as well as a

textbook. Another procedure would have been just as valid; for example, it would have been possible to give a dominant place to the theory constructed by Greimas (treated here very briefly, but published by the author himself in 1966), or to Coseriu's; or to begin with American semantics, which is nowadays primarily based on transformational theory (even so, I shall not discuss this approach, although, of course, I do not doubt its value). Therefore, although the present introduction is only one of several possible kinds, it *is* a possible one, and I hope it will be able to make clear, despite the perspective I have chosen, relations which can lead to a clearer understanding of so complex a phenomenon as language. I also hope, and in this I see its immediate usefulness, that it can serve as a methodological model for both semasiological and onomasiological studies.

Each chapter was first written as a lecture given in the years after 1960 in conferences and seminars in Europe and, during my travels in Latin America, from Argentina to Mexico. I decided to collect it all into a synthesis, wholeheartedly responding to the invitation of my friends Manuel Alvar and Antonio Quilis to give a series of lectures on *Present-day Tendencies in European Semantics*, in Malaga, from July 19th to August 26th 1967, on the occasion of the second Advanced Course on Spanish Philology.

This synthesis formed the essence of the first Spanish edition of this book (*Teoría semántica, Hacia una semántica moderna*, Madrid, Ediciones Alcalá, 1970, 278 pp.). This first edition was well received, and, when it was out of print, I published a second enlarged Spanish edition in 1977 (*Teoría semántica, Hacia una semántica moderna*, segunda edición corregida y aumentada, Madrid, Ediciones Alcalá, 1977, 302 pp)[1], which formed the basis for this first English edition. In the second Spanish edition as well as in the English translation, I could

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[1]In the meantime, from the same publishing house, had appeared Klaus Heger's book *Teoría semántica II, Hacia una semántica moderna*, Madrid, 1974, xii, 223 pp. which contains Heger's works between 1963 and 1970. This book went to press in 1970.

profit by numerous critical reviews of the first Spanish edition, especially by those of Ludwig Söll [†] (*ZrP* 87, 1971, 349–298 ["The whole book is characterized by its penetration and clarity, by its ample documentation, by a felicitous combination of theory and practice, and by numerous well-chosen personal observations"]), Pierre Gardette[†] (*RLiR* 37, 1973, 216 ["The best of the present introductory manuals to the problems and methods of modern semantics"]), Roger Wright (*Archivum Linguisticum* III (n.s.), 1972, 105–108 ["This book is the best and most interesting on semantic theory to have appeared for some time. The theory is perceptive and of immediate practical value; and for a professional linguist there are many intriguing parallels with modern American traditions"]), Ileana Vincenz (*Cahiers de linguistique théorique et appliquée* [Acad. Rép. Soc. de Roumanie, Bucharest] VIII, 1971, 261–266 ["The book by K. Baldinger is of note for its own semantic theory and for its accurate analysis. . . . It goes beyond the interest it could arouse in semantic theorists and specialists and demands the attention of everyone who wants to enter on the complex study of general linguistics"]), Georges Lüdi (*Vox Romanica* 30, 1971, 318–326 ["Thus, Baldinger's *Semantic Theory*, with its abundance of intelligent observations and suggestions, is an important contribution to semantic investigation, which is in the process of a radical transformation; orientation and guide at the same time"], and Francisco R. Adrados (*Revista española de lingüística* [Madrid] 1, 1971, 203–205 ["The book . . . constitutes, in short, a good introduction to semantics (not complete, the new American semantics is missing and so are the European approaches referred to above)"]). I also want to mention the critical review by Ana María Barrenechea (*Rom Phil* 26, 1972, 346–405), the only one that rejects the essence of the book ["In conclusion I shall say that this book, like all of Kurt Baldinger's works, shows us that he is a philologist of the first rank, with a knowledge of Romance lexicography achieved by very few, with a great sensitivity in perceiving differences of meaning in different contexts, and expressive nuances. We would praise, to use his words, his "esprit de finesse" and not

his "esprit de géométrie", since his theoretical presentations
are not as good as the intuitions in his concrete analysis"]. In
part, at least, Ana María Barrenechea's criticism was moti-
vated by the numerous errata (more than 150) in the first
edition, errata which often deform the sense of what I am say-
ing, and for which I am not personally responsible. I hope to
have overcome other objections in the second edition (cf. the
new chapter 7). The main resistance to the trapezium was
based, apparently, on the fear that the specific structure of one
language might be "replaced" by noematic systems indepen-
dent of any particular language, which would quite obviously
be absurd. I also want especially to mention the criticisms of
the triangular and trapezoidal model made by Helmut
Henne/Herbert E. Wiegand, "Geometrische Modelle und das
Problem der Bedeutung", *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und
Linguistik* 36, 1969, 129–173; it is probable that their inciden-
tal objections have been cleared up in the meantime, with the
modifications that Heger (cf. Chap. 7) has made to the
trapezoidal model[2]. Also concerned with the trapezium is
Estanislao Ramón Trives, "Hacia una descripción integrada de
la lengua. Análisis de las tendencias de la Semántica actual en
las doctrinas de K. Heger y B. Pottier", in *Anales de la Univer-
sidad de Murcia* XXIX, 1970–71, 5–41; "La lengua en su
constitución esencial interna", *ib.* XXX, 1971–72, 49–75.

Concerning the fear, occasionally felt by some traditional
linguists, of oversimplifying the infinite multiplicity and variety
of phenomena which occur in a language, I shall merely point
out, in the first place, that, in using the trapezium, no attempt
is made to restrict semasiological analysis with all its wealth of
possibilities and shadings, and that, in the second place, even
given its necessarily simplifying character, consequent on the

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[2]See also the article "Pleremik: Sprachzeichenbildung", pp.
132–144, by Henne/Wiegand, and "Lexikographie" by Henne, pp.
590–601, in the *Lexikon der Germanistischen Linguistik*, published by
H. P. Althaus, H. Henne and H. E. Wiegand, Tübingen (Niemeyer),
1973; H. E. Wiegand, *Synchronische Onomasiologie und
Semasiologie – Kombinierte Methoden zur Strukturierung der Lexik*,
Marburg, 1970 (Germanistische Linguistik, 3/70).

selection of particular elements, a noematic system provides a
much greater number of theoretical possibilities than are actu-
ally realized in a given language (cf., for example, the 256
possibilities of combination calculated by Heger in *Monem,
Wort, Satz und Text*, 1976, p. 299, for just one pre-
suppositional group – one among many other possible groups).
Now, more than ever, I am convinced of th‿ validity of the
theoretical conception which, in any case, has its origin not
with me, but with Klaus Heger, especially in its revised and
expanded version.

I have taken into consideration those objections which I con-
sidered justified, for this second edition. Since, as I pointed
out above, this book sets forth *one* possible semantic theory
and its historical evolution (from Ullmann's triangle to Heger's
trapezium), I have limited myself to correcting the errata and
the mistakes of the first edition, adding bibliographical data
and some examples; and, instead of revising some chapters, –
which would have given a false impression of the evolution of
the theory –, I have preferred to write the new chapter 7, "The
Present Form of the Trapezium". This chapter, in which I
reconsider a number of themes dealt with or mentioned
throughout the book, is based to a great extent on the intro-
ductory chapter of Heger's *Monem, Wort, Satz und Text*
(Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1976, 355 pp.). In this new final chap-
ter, which reflects the work done on remodelling the
trapezium since 1968, as well as the consequences of such a
remodelling for the whole semantic theory, all the assumptions
of the model, at the present state of discussion, are dealt with
again, and they are justified and given precise terminological
status. In fact the changes made, compared with the previous
chapters, enable one to measure the progress which has been
made in the meantime (for example, concerning the
differentiation between *seme* and *noeme*, the definitions of
polysemy, homonymy, synonymy and *polymorphy*, etc.). I
think that, in essence, the trapezoidal model has now been
given its definitive form and justification. Its practical value
has been demonstrated (cf. Part II, chap. 3, concerning
"remember", and in the near future the doctoral thesis of my

assistant Karl Brademann on the renderings of "remember" in Old and Middle French which will be published in the Beihefte of the *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie*).

For higher levels, Heger himself has recently published an analysis of an individual text[3]. Since, from the beginning, this book has been orientated to the semantic theory which leads from the triangle to the trapezium, I have decided against taking into consideration the ideas which are found in the present bibliography on semantics – which has now reached flood proportions –, since this would have had negative repercussions on the unity of this introduction to *one* semantic theory[4].

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[3]Klaus Heger, "Signemränge und Textanalyse", in Elisabeth Gülich, Klaus Heger, Wolfgang Raible, *Linguistische Textanalyse. Überlegungen zur Gliederung von Texten* (Papiere zur Textlinguistik, 8), Hamburg (Helmut Buske Verlag), 1974, 1–71; cf. also Wolfgang Raible, "Vergleich mit der von Klaus Heger durchgeführten Textanalyse", 127–147.

[4]See the excellent work by J. Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, Cambridge, 1968.

On semantics within transformational grammar, cf., for example, "the most ample and coherent presentation", of Jerrold J. Katz, *Semantic Theory*, New York (Harper and Row), 1972, 464 pp. (cf. the review by Christian Rohrer in *ZrP* 91, 1975). On structural semantics, see Eugenio Coseriu, *Probleme der strukturellen Semantik* (Vorlesung gehalten im Wintersemester 1965/66 an der Universität Tübingen, Autorisierte und bearbeitete Nachschrift von Dieter Kastovsky), Tübingen (Tübinger Beiträge zur Linguistik, edited by Gunter Narr [= TBL], 40), 1973; further *Einführung in die strukturelle Linguistik* (Vorlesung Tübingen, 1967/68; autorisierte Nachschrift besorgt von Gunter Narr und Rudolf Windisch), Tübingen (Romanisches Seminar), 1969; further, Coseriu, *Sprache, Strukturen und Funktionen*, XII Aufsätze, Tübingen, 1970; *Einführung in die strukturelle Betrachtung des Wortschatzes* (TBL, 14), Tübingen, 1970 [= German version of "Structure lexicale et enseignement du vocabulaire" (with the discussion), in *Actes Ier Coll. Int. Ling. Appl.*, Nancy, 1966, and of the article "Les structures lexématiques" in *Probleme der Semantik*, Wiesbaden, 1968]; "Les universaux linguistiques (et les autres)" in *Proceedings of the Eleventh Intern. Congress of Linguists (Bologna-*

At this point, I should like to express my gratitude to all those colleagues and friends who accompanied the evolution of this book throughout the last 15 years or helped me in one way or another – many names which I mentioned in the Spanish editions – ; most of all my friend Klaus Heger, with whom I am continuing to discuss all problems of semantics and general linguistics.

I am further grateful to William C. Brown, Jr. – an American linguist who took my courses in semantics at El Colegio de México in 1972 – for the English translation (from the Spanish edition), by no means an easy task. G. A. Padley (Université Laval, Québec) was kind enough to clarify with me many difficult passages in the English translation. And finally I am very grateful to my colleague Rebecca Posner (University of York), who undertook a revision of the complete translation, and to Roger Wright (University of Liverpool) who was charged by the Publisher Basil Blackwell to take care of the publication and to whom I am indebted for many improvements.

Florence 1972), Bologna, I, 1974, 47–73; "Logique du langage et logique de la grammaire", in *Modèles logiques et niveaux d'analyse linguistique* (Actes Colloque Metz 1974), Paris (Klincksieck) 1977, 15–33; "Vers une typologie des champs lexicaux", *CahLex* 27, 1975-II, 30–51, and the volume *Strukturelle Bedeutungslehre*, edited by Horst Geckeler, Darmstadt (Wissensch. Buchgesellschaft) 1978 (a collection of the most important articles on structural semantics).

Within Coseriu's school, Horst Geckeler, *Strukturelle Semantik des Französischen* (Romanistische Arbeitshefte, edited by G. Ineichen and Chr. Rohrer, 6), Tübingen (Niemeyer), 1973; and independent of any school Peter Schifko, *Bedeutungstheorie, Einführung in die linguistische Semantik*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt (Frommann-Holzboog) 1975.

As an introduction to general semiotics: Georges Mounin, *Introduction à la sémiologie*, Paris (Les Éditions de Minuit), 1970.

Introduction

"Neither in concepts nor in language is anything isolated"

Wilhelm von Humboldt: *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluß auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts*, Berlin, 1836, p. 205.

For several years, the study of semantics has been making progress which can be considered revolutionary. "The study of content is the order of the day", writes Nicolas Ruwet in 1964, in an excellent survey of the contemporary state of general linguistics[1]. As we know, we are indebted to the nineteenth century for historical grammar, the basis of modern linguistics, to which de Saussure and the twentieth century added the fundamental notions of synchrony and structure, linguistic geography and the sociology of language. Instead of retracing the history of linguistics, which is generally known, I should like to emphasize what I consider to be the essential result of this evolution: a series of new and fruitful distinctions:

(1) between synchrony and diachrony,
(2) between language and speech, or between system, norm and speech (Coseriu),

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[1]Nicolas Ruwet, "La linguistique générale aujourd'hui", in *Archives européennes de Sociologie*, 5, 1964, pp. 227–310. See also Uriel Weinreich, "On the Semantic Structure of Language", in *Universals of Language*, Cambridge/Mass. (The M.I.T. Press), 1963, pp. 114–71 (the "misguided positivism" of Bloomfield is overcome, p. 153).

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(3) between phonetics and phonology,

(4) between the level of expression and the level of content,

(5) between form and substance (these last two in Hjelm-slev's terminology),

(6) between the object language and the metalanguage, on different levels, – a recent important distinction.

One could add still more to those already mentioned[2]. To make distinctions is to introduce order, but is, at the same time, to split up an essential unity. But such is the eternal paradox of science, to divide single units in order to make them clear.

As a branch of science, semantics is about seventy years old, a respectable age. She has had daughters and sons, semasio-logical daughters and onomasiological sons perhaps, although I can make no guarantee as to their sex. In any case, the family is well-behaved, and to prove it one need only glance at Quadri's historical–bibliographical manual[3]. The large number of studies that already exist are for the most part the fruits of traditional lexicology derived from linguistic geography and the school of de Saussure. The theoretical foundation, then, dates from the years 1900 to 1920, enriched by a series of articles by Jud, Jaberg, von Wartburg and others[4]. But theoret-ical considerations remained on a secondary level – linked especially, in any case, to questions of diachrony – in spite of Trier's insistence on the importance of lexical fields, around

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[2]"We consider the distinction between *denotation* and *designation* to be essential to any workable program in semantic research", U. Weinreich, op. cit., p. 154, n. 3.

[3]Bruno Quadri, *Aufgaben und Methoden der onomasiologischen Forschung. Eine entwicklungsgeschichtliche Darstellung*, Bern (Francke), 1952, xviii + 271 pp.

[4]For details of this evolution see Kurt Baldinger, *La semasiología, Ensayo de un cuadro de conjunto*, Rosario (Universidad Nacional del Litoral, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras), 1964, 55 pp. [= *Die Semasiologie, Versuch eines Überblicks*, Berlin (Akademie-Verlag), 1957]. Translated into Spanish by Graciela García Montaño de Gardella (with two appendices on the most recent evolution).

1930[5]. Ullmann, in about 1950, made an inventory of this
evolution in an excellent synthesis, and at the same time estab-
lished a body of synchronic doctrines[6] centred on the famous
name–concept–thing triangle, the exterior form of which goes
back to Ogden and Richards[7]. I myself have followed (in an
article titled "Sémasiologie et onomasiologie", *RLiR* 28, 1964,
249–272; published as an appendix to this edition) the road
which Ullmann had left open. At present scholars are trying to
coordinate this traditional and semi-structural semantics – as
Weinrich calls it – with the revolutionary pressures exerted
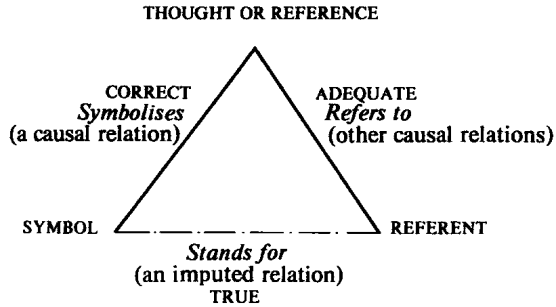from all sides, especially during the last few years: from

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[5]See, for example, Suzanne Öhmann, "Theories of the 'Linguistic
Field' ", in *Word*, 9, 1953, pp. 123–34; and now, especially, Horst
Geckeler, *Zur Wortfelddiskussion . . .,* München (Wilhelm Fink),
1971: (= *Semántica estructural y teoría del campo léxico*, Madrid,
1976); also E. Coseriu, "Vers une typologie des champs lexicaux",
CahLex 27, 1975, 30–51.
[6]S. Ullmann, *The Principles of Semantics*, [1]1951; [2]1957; *Semantics.
An Introduction to the Science of Meaning*, Oxford (Blackwell), 1962,
278 pp. Applied to French: S. Ullmann, *Précis de sémantique fran-
çaise*, Bern (Francke), [1]1952, [2]1959; translated into Spanish: S. Ull-
mann, *Introducción a la semántica francesa*, traducción y anotación
por Eugenio de Bustos Tovar, Madrid (C. S. I. C., Instituto "Miguel
de Cervantes"), 1965, xvi, 483 pp. S. Ullmann, *Language and Style*,
Collected Papers, Oxford (Blackwell), 1964, ix, 270 pp. (see my
review in *ZrP*, 82, 1966, pp. 597–600); S. Ullmann, *Meaning
and Style*, Collected Papers, Oxford (Blackwell), 1973, x, 175 pp
[see my recent review in *ZrP* 89, 1973, 609]; also, the following
articles: "Stylistics and Semantics" in *Literary Style: A Symposium*
(ed. S. Chatman), Oxford (University Press), 1971, pp. 133–155; "Le
vocabulaire, moule et norme de la pensée", in *Problèmes de la per-
sonne*, ed. I. Meyerson (Colloque du Centre de Recherches de
Psychologie comparative, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Sor-
bonne, 6e Section: Sciences économiques et sociales, Congrès et Col-
loques XIII), Paris–The Hague (Mouton), 1973, pp. 251–269
[= Original version of *Language and Style*, Chap. 10]; "How the
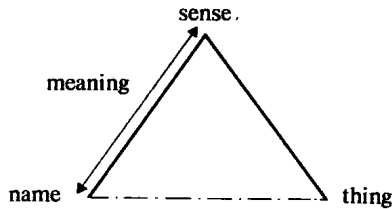Vocabulary grows", *Modern Languages* 54, 1973, pp. 1–8.
[7]Ogden and Richards's triangle in *The Meaning of Meaning*

structuralism[8], from automatic translation and general linguis-
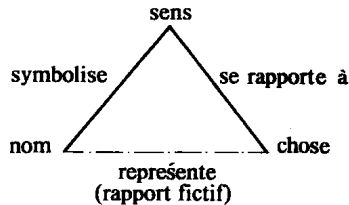tics, from logic[9], and from information theory[10]. All these tend-

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([1]1923, [10]1949 – fifth impression, 1960 p. 11) is reproduced here:

THOUGHT OR REFERENCE

CORRECT
Symbolises
(a causal relation)

ADEQUATE
Refers to
(other causal relations)

SYMBOL   REFERENT
Stands for
(an imputed relation)
TRUE

The Ullmann triangle (see *Semantics*, [2]1957, pp. 69, ff.) is:

sense.

meaning

name   thing

And in the *Précis de sémantique française* (Fr. ed. [2]1959, p. 22):

sens

symbolise   se rapporte à

nom   chose
represente
(rapport fictif)

[8]The structuralists began to be concerned with semantics in particu-
lar after the *VIIIe Cong. Int. des Linguistes*, Oslo, 1957; see below,
Chapter 3, note 1.

[9]"The new approach to logic, usually called "symbolic",
"mathematical", or "logistic", was essentially initiated by Gottlob
Frege. Frege took as a starting point phrases instead of concepts,
more precisely, a phrase structure with an empty slot in which there is
a variable which can be replaced by individual objects or by classes".
Franz Schmidt, *Zeichen und Wirklichkeit*, Stuttgart (Kohlhammer),
1966, p. 87.

[10] "According to information theory created by Claude E. Shannon in 1948, who based it on the calculation of probabilities and statistics – a theory which later also acquired importance in linguistics – one "bit" of information consists, in the first place, of symbols, such as letters, words, phrases, numbers. Quantitatively a "bit" of information is given when, from a quantity of symbols which are possible within the total of the signs, a selection can be made of preferred symbols, so that, based on this selection, the individual quantity of the information contributed by each symbol can be measured. This quantity, or rather size, called H, is measured by the smallest number of yes-and-no decisions enabling the receiver of the information to reconstruct it; starting with n selected symbols and s possible symbols, we arrive at the equation (according to Hartley, 1928):

$$H = n \cdot \log_2 s,$$

being the unit of measurement for the quantity of information, that is, the information content of each symbol, or the unit of counting (numerical unit) for binary decisions, equal to

$$1 \text{ bit} = 1 \log_2 2.$$

Shannon then generally calculated H for the integral value of a symbol i recurring with a determined probability. In such cases, it is always a question of a logarithmic number of binary decisions, by which the bit of information is defined mathematically, that is, of quantitative relations or proportions. The messages or communications, given their dependence on actual and potential signs, are subject to these relations. The concrete content of the information, which is all that interests the sender and receiver of the message, does not concern the information engineer at all (as in cybernetics). The qualitative determination of the message is obtained not through the content, but only by verification, that is to say, it is by mathematical determination that the message is conveyed by a fixed number of logarithmic operations. The concrete content, underlying the existing relations of magnitude, is known only by the sender and receiver of the message, since by understanding the symbols, they can treat them as signs. The logarithm on base 2 has been selected because the machines that transmit and formulate the signs (that is, signals, in the sense of cybernetics), for example, electronic digital computers, are so constructed that they concretize only two possible states, e.g. the "on" or "off" position of a relay, the switching on or off of an electric current, positive or negative magnetization, whether there is or is not a hole at a certain place on a perforated card; in this respect the

encies are connected; all (except Coseriu) are limited to the synchronic level and attempt to approach the realm of content with more precise methods, whether on the syntagmatic level or on the paradigmatic level. I shall limit myself to the paradigmatic level, the realm of "pure" lexicology, so to speak[11].

In this series of lectures, I shall attempt to follow with you my own road toward a *structural* semantics, a path which is still open and, I believe, full of promise. It is the road which goes

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machines work in the same way as the yes-or-no decisions that must be made". Franz Schmidt, *Zeichen und Wirklichkeit, Linguistisch-semantische Untersuchungen*, Stuttgart (Kohlhammer), 1966, pp. 95 ff.

[11]H. Weinrich, in the review of a study by B. Pottier, sees the future of semantics from the syntagmatic side: "There will be a kind of semantics which will no longer be the semantics of the word, but rather the semantics of the phrase, semantics in which the determination by the context will have its full value" (*Rom. Phil.* 18, 1965, p. 458).

In the same sense Knud Togeby, "Grammaire, lexicologie et sémantique" in *CahLex* 6, 1965, pp. 3–7: "so the lexicon must be represented as a complex of combinatory possibilities" (p. 4): "At last we come to *semantics*. In my view, this is only accessible via the behaviour of morphemes. It could be that morphemes have a sense and that this sense is the reason for the way they behave. There is a philosophical problem there with reference to which I would not dare to take up a position. All I know, and all anyone can know as a linguist, is that we have in front of us texts in which morphemes are distributed according to certain rules. *This syntactic behaviour is the only linguistic key that can open the door onto semantics*" (p. 5); "if we push these studies of combinatory possibilities as far as possible, perhaps we shall find confirmation in practice of Greimas' semantic analysis. But we cannot make this semantic analysis in a sure enough way unless we have built it on the foundations of the combinatory possibilities" (p. 7). See also, in this sense, Inger Rosengren, *Semantische Strukturen. Eine quantitative Distributionsanalyse einiger mittelhochdeutscher Adjektive* (Lunder Germanist. Forschungen 38), Lund-Kopenhagen, 1966, 153 pp. We believe that both outlooks (syntagmatic and paradigmatic) are justified, and are, in fact, far from being contradictory. – See now Part II chapter 7.