

ENCYCLOPEDIA DICTIONARY

N^o 61/D843
Johns Hopkins

of the Sciences of Language

Ducrot/Todorov

Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Sciences of Language

by Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov

Translated by Catherine Porter

Originally published in 1972 as *Dictionnaire
encyclopédique des sciences du langage*
© 1972, 1973, Éditions du Seuil

English translation © 1979 by The Johns Hopkins University Press

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Printed in the United States of America

The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Maryland 21218
The Johns Hopkins Press Ltd., London

Originally published, 1979
Second printing, 1980

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Ducrot, Oswald.

Encyclopedic dictionary of the sciences of
language.

Translation of *Dictionnaire encyclopédique
des sciences du langage*.

Includes bibliographical references.

1. Linguistics—Dictionaries—French.

I. Todorov, Tsvetan, joint author. II. Title.

P29.D813 410'.3 78-23901

ISBN 0-8018-2155-X

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

This translation is based on the second French edition of the *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973). It incorporates a number of revisions proposed by the authors; the articles on generative grammar and on time and modality in language in particular have been significantly altered and expanded. With the collaboration of the authors, the bibliographical material has been substantially updated. In addition, wherever possible, French titles have been replaced by English-language originals or translations. For the citation of sources within the body of the text, brief indications have been supplied in parentheses; full references are generally found in the adjacent bibliographical inserts.

I am indebted to Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov for their patient and generous cooperation throughout the preparation of the manuscript. For their willingness to read substantial portions of the text and for their helpful suggestions, I should like to thank John Bowers (Cornell University), George Dillon (Indiana University and Purdue University), Philip Lewis (Cornell University), Hugh Olmsted (State University of New York, College at Cortland), and Linda Waugh (Cornell University). The completed manuscript owes much to the skillful and attentive editing of Joanne Allen; for its errors and deficiencies the responsibility is mine alone.

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INTRODUCTION

The title of this work entails two particularities that correspond to two fundamental options and should be explained here: the plural *sciences* and the singular *language*.

We have chosen to use the word *language* in the restricted—and banal—sense of natural language, not in the currently widespread sense of sign system. Thus we shall not be dealing here with documentary languages, with the various arts considered as languages, with science taken as a well- or ill-constructed language, with animal language, gestural language, and so on. There are several reasons for this restriction. First, were we to leave the domain of the verbal, we would be obliged to deal with an object whose limits are difficult to pinpoint and which, owing to its very indeterminacy, might well coincide with the object of all the social sciences, if not with that of all sciences in general. If everything in human behavior is a sign, the presence of a “language,” in this broad sense, no longer allows us to delimit one object of knowledge among others. Moreover, social institutions, psychic structures, artistic forms, and the branches of science have been envisaged as sign systems only in recent times, and in order to discuss this development, we would be led much more often to create a science than to give an account of one, a task that would correspond neither with our aims nor with our capabilities. Finally, such an extension of the word *language* would imply the affirmation of a principal identity among the different sign systems; and we refused to grant this hypothesis the status of a postulate at the outset. The study of these systems may be the object of future works.

Although the word *language* is used here, then, in a restrictive sense, the plural *sciences* marks, on the other hand, our desire for openness. We have not wished at any point to separate the study of language from the study of its productions—by which we mean both the way it functions (hence the space allotted to enunciation, to linguistic acts, to language as it is actually used) and the resulting discursive sequences, whose organization is no longer directly controlled by the mechanism of language alone (hence the numerous articles devoted to literary questions, the discourse of literature having been more thoroughly studied than any other). Every attempt to isolate the study of language from

the study of discourse turns out, sooner or later, to be detrimental to both. By bringing them together, moreover, we are simply reviving a long tradition, that of philology, which never conceived of the description of language without a description of texts. Thus beyond linguistics in the narrow sense we have represented in this volume poetics, rhetoric, stylistics, psycho-, socio-, and geo-linguistics, and even some research in semiotics and in the philosophy of language. We are subscribing thereby to the credo previously formulated by one of the masters of modern linguistics, Roman Jakobson: *Linguistica sum: linguistici nihil a me alienum puto.*

Although we are not casting ourselves here as adherents to any particular school, we have been led, more often than is customary in this type of work, to take a personal position and even to present, here and there, some original research, incomplete and provisional though we know it to be. Rather than a survey of opinions, which would reflect an illusory ideal of impartiality, we have sought to give a coherent overview of problems—an undertaking that always requires the choice of a point of view. Let us indicate ours briefly.

In order to study the problems of language, we have chosen to consider them in a perspective that is essentially semantic. The problems of meaning—of its levels, of its modes of manifestation—are central to this entire work. The importance attributed to meaning entails several consequences:

1. We have presented in detail the generative and transformational theory of Chomsky, who has contributed more than anyone else toward removing the suspicion with which semantic questions have been regarded by “scientific” linguistics for a long time. (This has led us moreover to point out certain difficulties that Chomsky’s theory has encountered and that explain its recent evolution.)

2. Similarly, we have given an important place to the history of the sciences of language (locating its beginnings well before the nineteenth century), for this history is concerned with debates that, in the last analysis, also hinge upon the relationships between language and meaning: even the debate between Saussure and the historical linguistics of the nineteenth century, which crystallizes around specific technical questions, ultimately brings into play two different conceptions of the act of signification.

3. We have set forth, in connection with various problems—reference and modality, for example—the viewpoint of certain logicians. This viewpoint is today fairly commonly declared “linguistically irrelevant” (an expression that we do not find very appealing); it is alleged that logicians undertake, not to describe language, but only to propose rules

concerning its utilization. It seems to us, however, that research in logic can be quite revealing for the linguist, since the difficulties that the logician encounters in seeking to enunciate the laws of reasoning point up, by contrast, the specificity of natural languages.

4. "Purely literary" questions sometimes touch upon the examination of linguistic categories; thus the discussion of the character follows upon that of the parts of speech and of the syntactic functions. As a result, one finds an occasional unevenness in the level of rigor attained at one point or another, an unevenness that we hope will be temporary and that reflects the irregular rhythm of the development of the sciences. We have chosen this approach because we believe in the authenticity of the relationship that links linguistic and discursive categories and because we believe that studying these sciences concurrently will be to the advantage of both.

5. Conversely, we were obliged to treat less extensively the problems of phonic expression and the historical kinship of languages; however, we have tried to present in these areas the notions that have become the common stock and the constant reference points of linguists and that are indispensable to the understanding of current research on language.*

We admit to a certain temerity in presenting, in some four hundred pages, an overview of the sciences of language, given their extraordinary development, especially during the past fifty years, and the fact that they display at one and the same time a systematic cast (each notion must be understood in relation to a host of others) and a chaotic aspect (that is, they display neither fixed principles nor a stable terminology). In order to deal with these difficulties, we have proceeded in the following way.

The book is organized, not on the basis of a list of words, but according to a conceptual division of the domain under examination. The alternative solution (which was still possible at the time of J. Marouzeau's *Lexique de la terminologie linguistique*) would have entailed, at this point, either innumerable repetitions, taking up too much space, or a litany of cross references, requiring an unreasonable degree of patience from the reader. So we have written some fifty articles, each of which focuses on a well-defined topic, constitutes a whole, and allows for a sustained reading. Within these articles, about eight hundred terms are defined; an index at the end of the volume provides an alphabetical list of these terms, with a reference to the passage in the book where the

* For a detailed study of these problems, see the *Guide alphabétique de la linguistique*, produced under the direction of A. Martinet (Paris, 1969), a work that is more or less symmetrical to ours in the sense that it takes as central the problems that we deal with marginally—and vice versa.

definition can be found. In addition, the reader seeking information on a particular doctrine will find an index of authors, with references to the passages where they are discussed (we have omitted references to purely allusive or bibliographical remarks in which these authors may occasionally be mentioned).

Finally, wherever it has been necessary in the very development of an article to make use of terms or to allude to topics presented elsewhere, numbers in brackets indicate the page on which these terms or themes are explained.

The articles are arranged in an analytic order rather than an alphabetical one. Here is the principle followed.

The first section, "Schools," traces the major trends that constitute, in their evolution, the history of modern linguistics (general grammars, historical linguistics, glossematics, and so on).

The second, "Fields," describes the entire cluster of disciplines for which language is the object—the various branches of linguistics, poetics, stylistics, psycholinguistics, the philosophy of language, and so on.

The other two sections are devoted to describing the principal concepts we have used. Within the first, entitled "Methodological Concepts"—which includes the most general concepts, such as those of the sign, syntagma and paradigm, language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*), code and message—the order followed reflects our effort to proceed, insofar as possible and without envisaging a strict hierarchy, from basic to derived concepts. In the final section, entitled "Descriptive Concepts," more specific concepts are treated—for example, the phoneme, parts of speech, meaning and reference, style; their arrangement proceeds from the simple to the complex, starting with the distinctive phonic feature and concluding with complete linguistic acts.

Constructed in this manner, the volume seems to us to allow for a dual reading: it can be employed as a dictionary or as an encyclopedia. It is thus intended for specialists as well as for beginners in all the areas ranging from linguistics to literary studies.

The language in which the articles are written aims to be as non-technical as possible. Linguistics—and, to an even greater extent, each of the other disciplines represented here—lacks a unified terminology. Thus if we were to use a technical language, we would be forced either to combine diverse terminologies or to choose one from among them—which would amount to privileging, *a priori*, the doctrine that developed it. We have preferred to use the least specialized language possible and, with the help of this common language, to provide definitions of technical terms. For example, while we propose narrow and restrictive definitions for the terms "meaning" (*signification*), "language system" (*langue*), and "language" (*langage*), we use these terms throughout the work in the

broader sense that they have in ordinary language. However, when we are obliged to use a technical expression, or to use an expression in a technical sense, we provide in our text a reference to the page where the expression is defined.

The bibliographies—provided within the articles, at the end of each development—are not intended to be exhaustive; they are only intended to indicate either some historically prominent texts or some works of incontestable relevance.

For certain articles we have sought the help of collaborators, namely, Mme Maria-Scania de Schonen, Mme Marie-Christine Hazaël-Massieux, and M. François Wahl. We should like to express our appreciation to them here.

OSWALD DUCROT
TZVETAN TODOROV

CONTENTS

Translator's Note vii

Introduction ix

SCHOOLS

General Grammars (o.d.)	3
Historical Linguistics in the Nineteenth Century (o.d.)	7
Saussurianism (o.d.)	14
Glossematics (o.d.)	20
Functionalism (o.d.)	24
Distributionalism (o.d.)	31
Generative Linguistics (o.d.)	37
Appendix: Ancient and Medieval Linguistics (o.d. and t.t.)	44

FIELDS

Components of Linguistic Description (o.d.)	51
Geolinguistics (o.d.)	57
Sociolinguistics (t.t.)	61
Psycholinguistics (m.s. de s.)	68
Rhetoric and Stylistics (t.t.)	73
Poetics (t.t.)	78
Semiotics (t.t.)	84
Philosophy of Language (o.d.)	92

METHODOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

Sign (t.t.)	99
Syntagma and Paradigm (o.d.)	106
Linguistic Categories (o.d.)	111
Language and Speech (o.d.)	118
Norm (o.d.)	124
Arbitrariness (o.d.)	130
Synchrony and Diachrony (o.d.)	137
History of Literature (t.t.)	144

Literary Genres (T.T.)	149
Language Acquisition (M.S. de S.)	156
Language Pathology (M.S. de S.)	161
DESCRIPTIVE CONCEPTS	
Nonsignificative Units (O.D.)	169
Linguistic Prosody (M.-C.H.-M.)	176
Versification (T.T.)	185
Writing (T.T.)	193
Significative Units (O.D.)	199
Parts of Speech (O.D.)	203
Syntactic Functions (O.D.)	209
Motif (T.T.)	216
Character (T.T.)	221
Generative Rules (O.D.)	226
Surface Structures and Deep Structures (O.D.)	235
Reference (O.D.)	247
Typology of the Phenomena of Meaning (T.T.)	253
The Discourse of Fiction (T.T.)	259
Semantic Combinatorial (O.D.)	264
Figure (T.T.)	273
Semantic Relationships among Sentences (O.D.)	281
Discursive Transformations (T.T.)	289
Text (T.T.)	294
Style (T.T.)	300
Time and Modality in Language (O.D.)	304
Discursive Time (O.D. and T.T.)	317
Enunciation (T.T.)	323
Point of View in Fiction (T.T.)	328
Speech Situation (O.D.)	333
Language and Action (O.D.)	338
Appendix: Toward a Critique of the Sign (F.W.)	347
Index of Terms Defined	367
Index of Authors	378

SCHOOLS

GENERAL GRAMMARS

After drawing up various grammars (Greek, Latin, and Spanish), Claude Lancelot, a professor at the Petites Ecoles of Port-Royal des Champs, wrote in 1660, in collaboration with Antoine Arnauld, a *Grammaire générale et raisonnée*, often called since then the *Grammaire de Port-Royal*. A **general grammar** aims at enunciating certain principles that govern all languages and provide the basic explanation of their uses. It thus represents an attempt to define the general phenomenon of language (*langage*), of which the individual languages are particular cases. The example of the Port-Royal grammarians was followed by a large number of eighteenth-century grammarians, especially in France; these scholars judged that the acquisition of particular **languages**, unless grounded in a general grammar, is reduced to a purely mechanical exercise involving only memory and habit.

If all languages have a common basis, it is because they all have the goal of allowing human beings to express themselves, to make their thoughts known to each other. Lancelot and Arnauld admit implicitly, and certain later grammarians (such as Beauzée) affirm explicitly, that the communication of thought through speech requires that the latter be a sort of “picture,” an “imitation” of thought. When they say that the function of language is the **representation** of thought, this word must thus be taken in the strongest possible sense. It does not mean simply that speech is a sign, but that it is a mirror, that it sets up an internal analogy with the content it conveys. How does it happen, then, that these words that have “nothing in common with what happens in our minds” can nonetheless imitate “the various movements of our soul”?

It is not a question, for the authors of general grammars, of seeking in the materiality of the word an imitation of the thing or of the idea (although the belief in the imitative value of language sounds is found in all periods of linguistic reflection, even in the seventeenth century in certain texts of Leibnitz). For these authors, only the organization of words in the linguistic utterance (*énoncé*) has the power to represent. But how is it actually possible for a collection of separate words to represent a thought whose primary characteristic is “indivisibility” (the term is used by Beauzée)? Does not the fragmentation imposed by the

material nature of words contradict the essential unity of the mind? In order to answer this question (the same question that in the nineteenth century guided Humboldt's reflection on the linguistic expression of relationships), one must note that there exists an analysis of thought that respects its unity even while decomposing it—namely, the analysis undertaken by logicians. By distinguishing in a proposition a subject (that about which one affirms something) and a predicate (that which is affirmed about it), we do not shatter its unity, since each of these terms must be defined in relation to the other, since the subject is only a subject in relation to a possible predication, and since the predicate is not self-sufficient but includes a “confused idea” of the subject about which it is affirmed. As a result, the speech act can allow the indivisibility of the intellectual act to appear if the fragmentation into words reproduces the logical analysis of thought. It is on these terms that “the art of analyzing thought is the basis for the art of speaking, or, in other words, that a sound logic is the basis for the art of grammar” (Beauzée). We have moved, then, from the idea that language is simply representation to the idea that it is the representation of logical thought. By the same token, it was understood that there could be a general grammar; since hardly anyone doubted the universality of logic, it seemed natural that there should be principles, equally universal, that all languages must respect when attempting to render visible, through the constraints of written and oral communication, the structure of logical thought. It was understood as well that knowledge of these principles could be obtained in a “rational” (and not an inductive) fashion, starting from a reflection on the logical operations of the mind and on the necessities of communication. It became apparent, finally, that this general and rational grammar in turn made it possible to account for the practices observed in the various languages: it was a matter of “applying to the immutable and general principles of the spoken or written word the arbitrary and customary institutions” of particular languages.

Examples

The principal categories of words correspond to the fundamental moments of logical thought. Since judgment consists in attributing a property (predicate) to a thing, languages include words to designate things (substantives), properties (adjectives), and the act of attribution itself (the verb *to be*; the other verbs represent, according to the Port-Royal grammarians, an amalgam of the verb *to be* and an adjective: “the dog runs” equals “the dog is running”). Other categories, while linked to the exercise of logical thought, are determined in addition by the con-

dition of communication. Thus the impossibility of having a name for each thing imposes recourse to common nouns, whose extension is then limited by articles or demonstratives. In the same way, by the combination of logical principles and the constraints of communication, certain rules—presented as universal—will be formulated. For example, the agreement between a noun and the adjective that determines it, an agreement necessary for clear communication (making it possible to know on which noun the adjective depends), must be an agreement of concord (identity of number, gender, and case), since according to their logical nature, the adjective and the noun refer to one and the same thing (the *Port-Royal Grammar* goes so far as to justify the agreement of the participle in French). Or again, there is a word order that is natural and universal (the one that places the noun before the attributive adjective, the subject before the verb), since in order to understand the attribution of a property to an object, one must first conceive of the object; only then is it possible to affirm something about it.

To the extent that counterexamples immediately spring to mind (Latin and German hardly respect this “natural order”), this last rule makes it clear that a theory of figures is indispensable to all general grammars. A rhetorical figure [273] is conceived of at this point in time as an artificial and improper way of speaking that, for reasons of elegance and expressivity, is voluntarily substituted for a natural way of speaking that must be reconstructed before the meaning can be understood. According to general grammars, such **figures** are found not only in literature but in language itself. They stem from the fact that language, destined at a primitive stage to represent logical thought, is eventually placed at the service of the passions. The latter impose, for example, abbreviations (elements that are logically necessary but convey no emotional content are left unexpressed) and, very frequently, a reversal of natural order (the most important word, not the logical subject, comes first). In all these cases, the implied words and the natural order were initially present in the mind of the speaker and must be reestablished by the hearer (the Roman who heard *Venit Petrus* was obliged, in order to understand, to reconstruct for himself *Petrus venit*). Thus Latin and German are called **transpositive** languages because they invert an initially recognized order. The existence of figures of speech, far from contradicting the general principles, confirms them. Figures do not replace the rules; rather they superimpose themselves on them.

- For the basic texts, see A. Arnauld and C. Lancelot, *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* (1660; reprint ed. with preface by M. Foucault, Paris, 1969), Eng. trans., *A General and Rational Grammar* (1753; facsimile reprint ed., Menston, England, 1968); N. Beauzée, *Grammaire générale* (1767; facsimile reprint ed., Stuttgart, 1974); and C. Chesneau du Mar-

sais, *Logique et principes de grammaire* (Paris, 1769). For further information, see G. Harnois, *Les Théories du langage en France de 1660 à 1821* (Paris, 1929); G. Sahlin, *César Chesneau du Marsais et son rôle dans l'évolution de la grammaire générale* (Paris, 1928); N. Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics* (New York, 1966), a work discussed, for example, in H. M. Bracken, "Chomsky's Variations on a Theme by Descartes," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (1970): 181-92; R. Donzé, *La Grammaire générale et raisonnée de Port-Royal* (Bern, 1967); J.-C. Chevalier, *Histoire de la syntaxe* (Geneva, 1968); P. Julliard, *Philosophies of Language in Eighteenth-Century France* (The Hague, 1970); and L. H. Hillman, *Vaugelas and the Port-Royal Grammar* (Ithaca, 1972).

What is the historical importance of general grammar? First, it marks, at least in intention, the end of the privilege accorded in preceding centuries to Latin grammar, which had tended to become the model for all grammar: general grammar is no more Latin than it is French or German; rather it transcends all language systems. It is understandable that it became a commonplace practice in the eighteenth century (repeated in many of the linguistic articles in the *Grande Encyclopédie*) to condemn grammarians who could only see one language through another (or, as O. Jespersen was to describe them in the twentieth century, those who speak of one language while peering at another). On the other hand, general grammarians avoided the dilemma, seemingly insurmountable until their time, of a purely philosophical and purely empirical grammar. The numerous treatises on modes of signifying (*De modis significandi*) in the Middle Ages were devoted to general reflection on the act of signification. From another standpoint, grammar as Vaugelas understood it was only a recording of practices, that is, of "good practices" (*bons usages*), the quality of the practice being judged primarily in terms of the quality of the language user in question. General grammar, for its part, attempted to explain particular practices by deducing and applying general rules. If these rules could claim such explanatory power, it was because, although grounded in logic, they were not content merely to repeat it: they expressed its possible transparency through the material conditions of human communication.