

SEMANTICS AND HERMENEUTICS

The capacity to make use of language as a means of communication is a unique characteristic of the human species, and when a man makes some statement or other, his words convey a meaning to the hearer, or they may even call for interpretation, and "all interpretation is essentially linguistic."¹ There are two distinct but closely related sciences dealing with the problems of meaning and interpretation, namely, semantics,² and hermeneutics,³ and it is the purpose of this paper to try to bring out the significance of the former for the latter. Professional linguists have their own special techniques which cannot entirely be followed in this modest study because of typographical difficulties. Furthermore, their way of referring to scholarly publications is different from the one usually adopted in contributions that claim to be *wissenschaftlich*: we make use of the commonly accepted system of reference.⁴

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1. H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, 1975), p. 359.
 2. From *sēmainō*, "to show by a sign, indicate, make known," etc., a denominative verb created from *sēma*, "sign, mark, token"; this substantive has been linked with Sanskrit *dhya-men-*, "thought", and Saka *śśāma-* "sign", but this correspondence is not certain, and there are authorities who maintain that the world is "ohne überzeugende Etymologie" (H. Frisk, *Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* 2 vols. Indogermanische Bibliothek. II. Reihe: Wörterbücher, Heidelberg, 1970-73), II, p. 696).
 3. From *hērmēneūō*, "to interpret foreign tongues", a denominative of *hērmēneus*, "an interpreter of alien tongues, a dragoman"; the present term has been linked with Latin *sermō*, etc., and even an Anatolian origin has been postulated. It seems safest to say, "Technischer Ausdruck ohne Etymologie" (Frisk, *op. cit.*, I, p. 563). On the development of the current expression hermeneutic(s), cf. J. M. Robinson-J.B. Cobb (eds.), *The New Hermeneutic (New Frontiers in Theology, Vol. II, New York, 1964)* pp. ix. Reference may be made here to the monumental work of J. Wach, *Das Verstehen. Grundzüge einer Geschichte der hermeneutischen Theorie im 19. Jahrhundert* (3 vols., Tübingen, 1926, 1929, 1933).
 4. A large number of highly specialized articles and monographs are appearing at a steady pace in the West like the bibliography in J. Lyons, *Semantics* (2 vols.,

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The object of semantics may be clarified with the help of the question, "What is the meaning of the sentence S of the language L?" Semantics, then, investigates not the meaning of individual lexical items listed in dictionaries but that of sentences, as is amply borne out by the three following sentences constructed at random :

- (1) His pen had conceived sinister plans.
- (2) The unmarried girl is married to a bachelor.
- (3) He was looking for the charger.

Though all the items in (1) and (2) have their lexical meanings, readers will concede that (1) is semantically anomalous, and (2) contradictory: as for (3), it is semantically ambiguous, since the word 'charger' has four distinct meanings.⁵ To understand the meaning of a sentence, and its relations to other expressions, just the knowledge of the meaning of the various lexical elements or lexemes will not suffice: one must know too how they are related among themselves.

Our understanding of the interrelationship of the lexical items is dependent on the syntactic structure of sentences,⁶ yes, on the structure which is itself constituted by abstract grammatical relations; compare,

- (a) It was quite easy to find the appropriate word.
- (b) To find the appropriate word was quite easy.
- (c) The appropriate word was quite easy to find.

Cambridge, 1977). An excellent survey of research is furnished by H. Geckeler (ed.), *Strukturelle Bedeutungslehre* (Wege der Forschung Bd. 426, Darmstadt, 1978). The present writer wishes to make known that he has at his disposal only a very limited number of books on linguistics, and unfortunately the Indian publications in the field remain *manqué* since most Indian authors have no knowledge of the continental languages.

5. They are : (1) a platter (archaic), (2) a horse fit to be ridden in battle, (3) an apparatus that charges storage batteries, and (4) a person or thing that charges (thus *The Random House Dictionary of English* [Indian ed., Bombay, 1975], p. 226b).
6. On this point, cf. N. Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague, 1957); *Aspect of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, Mass, 1965).

These three sentences, exhibiting as they do surface differences, have the same deep structure,⁷ and it is the task of the theory of syntax to indicate that "the appropriate word" is the direct object of "find", and somebody's finding it is the subject of "was quite easy."

Semantics is closely bound up with syntax, for it is the syntactic rules that generate sentences, and assign to each sentence an underlying phrase marker which represents the deep structure, and a derived phrase marker which represents the surface structure. Syntax is generative, that is, it reflects the creative or productive aspect of language: we are able to produce an indefinite number of sentences, among which must be included also sentences that we have never before read or heard. The sentences we automatically generate are phonetically realized through phonological rule,⁸ and semantics is interpretative, assigning an interpretation to the abstract structures created by syntax.

We can therefore say that semantics endeavours, (a) to indicate the syntactic structure in a precise way, (b) to represent systematically the meaning of words, (c) to show how the meanings of words and syntactic relations interact, and (d) to point out how the sentences are related to the things they deal with.

It would be a serious mistake to fancy that the study of the problem of meaning is absolutely new. As a matter of fact, the Greeks had already perceived that meaning was a moot question,⁹ and there is also the traditional theory of semantics which, in spite of some of its glaring drawbacks, is still accepted by those who are familiar with modern linguistics.¹⁰ We also wish to note here that there was a time when descriptive linguists were wont to look askance at semantics, arguing that the problem of meaning had nothing to do with the description of languages, that it belonged to the domain of

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7. This distinction, which has now become commonly accepted and serves as the basis of discussions on semantics and syntax, was, it would seem, clearly formulated for the first time by C. F. Hockett, *A Course in Modern Linguistics* (Indian ed., Delhi, 1970), pp. 246-52.
 8. The distinction between the phonetic and phonological analysis of languages is discussed in detail in the well-known manuals of linguistics as for example, in Lyons *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics* (Cambridge, 1969) pp. 99ff.
 9. Plato, for instance, had his own theories (cf. J. Derbolav, *Platons Sprachphilosophie im 'Kratylos' und in den späteren Schriften*, Impulse der Forschung 10, Darmstadt, 1972).
 10. Lyons, *Introduction*, pp. 403-12.

philosophy, psychology and anthropology.¹¹ And positivists went to the extent of stating that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language."¹² However, thanks to the understanding of the distinction between the deep and surface structures in grammar, the study of meaning has been recognized as an integral part of the science of linguistics.

In recent times several approaches have been developed to investigate the problem of meaning: thus there is the theory of semantic fields, put forward by Swiss and German linguists, such as Ipsen, Jolles, Porzig, and particularly Trier.¹³ We shall mention here very briefly the theory of Trier which rests on the postulate that the vocabulary of a language is an integrated system of lexemes, related among themselves by reason of their sense. Now the lexemes, and the relations of sense binding them to each other, are in a constant state of flux, and any broadening or narrowing of the sense of one lexeme involves a corresponding narrowing or broadening of the sense of one or more of its neighbouring lexemes. In this understanding of language change diachronic or historical linguistics becomes the study of a series of successive synchronic phrases of a given language. The investigator compares the structure of a lexical field at a period of time which may be called t_1 with the structure of the same at another period which may be termed t_2 . This comparison is possible because they, despite the difference in lexical fields ("Wortfeld," "Wortfelder"), extend over the same conceptual field ("Sinnfeld").

Examples may be cited from such areas as colour ('red' as structured by 'scarlet,' 'crimson,' 'vermillion,' etc.), kinship terms (the field of male relatives that includes father, uncle, brother, son, etc.), verbs of motion ('to move,' as structured by 'to walk,' 'to run,' etc.), and so on. Trier adduces examples from early Germanic documents which are not discussed here as they are of little or no interest to our readers. For our purpose it is enough to note that his approach has come under severe criticism.¹⁴

11. This is the position taken for granted in the programmatic book of L. Bloomfield, *Language* (New York, 1933; several reprints).

12. Such is the view of L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Blackwell Paper back, Oxford, 1976), pp. 212, 220, etc.

13. L. Schmidt (ed.), *Wortfeldforschung. Zur Geschichte und Theorie des sprachlichen Feldes* (Wege der Forschung 250, Darmstadt, 1973). This important work contains studies by Trier (5 contributions), Ipsen, Porzig, Jolles and other exponents of the theory of the field of meaning.

14. Lyons, *Semantics* I, pp. 250-61.

Another recent theory is that of meaning postulates connected together by means of logical constants like 'and', 'or', 'not', etc.¹⁵ The procedure may be illustrated as follows:

- (a) boy → male
- (b) girl → female
- (c) man → male and adult
- (d) woman → female and adult.
- (e) boy/girl → not adult.

Rule (a) states that 'boy' implies 'male'; in other words, the sentence "A boy is a male", or "If X is a boy, then X is a male", is analytic, and the meaning of the lexical elements it contains is specified by the complex of all the meaning postulates in which it occurs. Put in a more precise way, the meaning of a particular lexeme of the language L is defined by the group of all meaning postulates associated with L.

The author of this theory, Carnap, makes a distinction between logical, necessary truth, based on meaning ("If Jack is a bachelor, then he is unmarried"), and that of empirical statements, dependent on the contingent facts of the world ("Fido is stout," or, "Fido is not stout"); he endeavours to investigate truth based upon meaning within the framework of a semantical system, by using what he calls the 'meaning postulates'.¹⁶

The most widely accepted method of approach, however, is that of componential analysis, developed in Europe by L. Hjelmslev¹⁷ and R. Jakobson,¹⁸ two well-known scholars who continue the structuralist tradition of the post-Saussurean period, but whose views are by no means identical. The European tradition of componential analysis

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15. The proponent of this new approach is R. Carnap, one of the leaders of the celebrated Vienna circle. (cf. his article, "Meaning Postulates," *Philosophical Studies* 3 (1952), pp. 65-73; cf. too his monograph *Meaning and Necessity. A Study in Semantics and Model Logic*, Phoenix Books, 4th repr., Chicago, 1964), pp. 222-29.
 16. The examples adduced here are from Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity*, pp. 222-29.
 17. Cf. his work (originally published in Danish), *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (Bloomington, Ind., 1953).
 18. Jakobson's writings of the period before World War II are not accessible to me; for all practical purposes, cf. his *Selected Writings. II. Word and Language* (The Hague, 1971).

is represented by Bierwisch, Coseriu, Greimas, Pottier and others.¹⁹ In America the method was adopted first by professional anthropologists as a technique for analysing kinship terms,²⁰ and then by linguists who did much to put it on a scientific basis.²¹

Needless to say, each scholar has his own personal way of approaching the question of meaning, and, compelled by sheer necessity, has to restrict his analysis to a very limited area. Notwithstanding all this, it may be said that components (known also as sense-components, features, markers, or sememes) are theoretical elements postulated for the purpose of describing the semantic relations between the lexemes of a given language; they are not part of the vocabulary of any particular language but rather are atomic concepts, whose nature now remains to be clarified.

Before we proceed further, we wish to recall here that modern linguists make use of several typographical conventions (some of them quite complicated), and a fairly simplified form of them will be adopted in what follows: lexemes are printed in italics, their meanings are put within double inverted commas, and the componential elements are indicated with the help of capitals. Accordingly, *man*, the Germanic lexeme, has the meaning "man", and is the product of the components MALE and ADULT and HUMAN. In other words, MALE and ADULT and HUMAN are the components of the lexical item *man*, which has the meaning "man". Components are therefore atomic concepts and lexemes molecular concepts, and the lexeme *man* combines with the atomic concepts M/A/H to produce "man."²²

It is important to note that *man* and "man" are not, theoretically speaking, identical, nor are they to be simply equated with M/A/H, for these do not at all belong to the language that is being described, even though these can be lexicalized in particular languages. While speaking of semantic components, writers at times employ the word product, which calls for a brief comment: it has to be understood in terms of the conjunction of components. The lexical item *man*

19. For detailed references, cf. Lyons, *Semantics* I, pp. 336-56 (bibliography); cf. too Geckler, *Strukturelle Bedeutungslehre* (n. 4 above), which includes studies by Benveniste, Coseriu, Greimas, Lyons and others.

20. Lyons, *op. cit.*, p. 318.

21. This "led to the integration of semantics and syntax within the framework of transformational grammar" (Lyons, *ibid.*).

22. Lyons, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

(which has as its binary opposite the item *woman*) represents the intersection of the classes M/A/H which are themselves intentions of the atomic concepts MALE and ADULT and HUMAN.²³

Components have been divided into semes and classemes,²⁴ namely, components depending upon minimal functional oppositions which are operative within a single lexical field, and the very general component elements common to lexemes that belong to different lexical fields. Classemes tend to be both lexicalized and grammaticalized, and the best examples for classemes will be ANIMATE/INANIMATE and MALE/FEMALE. For all practical purposes the present distinction, we must avow, coincides with the one between distinguishers and markers proposed by some American linguists.²⁵

It is classemes that determine the semantically valid syntagmatic relations between nouns and adjectives, or between nouns and verbs. To consider a concrete example, it is the classeme MALE that determines the semantic validity of Italian *ammogliarsi*, Rumanian *a se insura*, and Russian *zhenitsja*,²⁶ in sentences which in English will contain the verb "to marry." This way of understanding classemes has also its limitations, for in languages like Turkish²⁷ and Armenian²⁸

23. Lyons, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

24. This has been done particularly by E. Coseriu, *Sprachtheorie und Sprachwissenschaft* (Munich, 1975). The present work is the translation of Coseriu's Spanish original *Teoria del Lenguaje y Lingüística General* (Madrid, 1962); cf. too the survey by Coseriu and Geckeler, "Linguistics and Semantics", in T. A. Seboek, (ed.), *Current Trends in Linguistics*, 12 (1974), pp. 103-71. Another work worth mentioning here is B. Pottier, *Linguistique générale* (Paris, 1974), which too develops the distinction between semes and classemes.

25. Cf. especially J. J. Katz-J. A. Fodor, "The Structure of a Semantic Theory", *Language* 39 (1963) pp. 170-210, reprinted in Fodor-Katz, *The Structure of Language: Readings in the Philosophy of Language* (New York, 1964) pp. 479-518. The theory has, however, been challenged by several experts.

26. The Italian verb, actually a denominative created from *moglie*, "wife", is the opposite of *maritarsi*, "to get oneself a husband" (*marito*). The Rumanian expression is the intransitive-reflexive form of *insurà*, "to marry", and has as its antonym a similar form used exclusively of women, *a se marità* (cf. *marità*, "to marry"). The Russian word too a denominative verb, from the noun form *zhena*, "wife", and has as its antonym, *vyxoditj zamuzh*, literally, "to go (come) out married" (cf. *muzh*, "husband"; compare too *vyiti zamuzh*, a synonym of the phrase just cited (*vyiti*, "to go out, come out").

27. J. Németh, *Turkish Grammar* (Columbia University Publications in Near and Middle East Studies, Series B/1, The Hague, 1962), pp. 53f.

28. H. Jensen, *Altarmenische Grammatik* (Indogermanische Bibliothek. I. Reihe: Lehr- und Handbücher, Heidelberg, 1959) pp. 47f., 77.

which do not admit of gender distinctions in personal pronouns, the component MALE has no semantic relevance.

Coming now to the actual techniques of componential analysis, as practised by its advocates, we wish to add here a somewhat over-simplified example, taking as our theme the lexemes mentioned in connection with meaning postulates:²⁹

- (a) *boy* : ANIMATE and HUMAN and MALE and not ADULT
- (b) *girl* : ANIMATE and HUMAN and FEMALE and not ADULT
- (c) *man* : ANIMATE and HUMAN and MALE and ADULT
- (d) *woman* : ANIMATE and HUMAN and FEMALE and ADULT.

In this table the lexical elements are explicitly defined, but there is also the possibility of supplementing it with the help of a series of implicational rules :

- (a) HUMAN → ANIMATE
- (b) MALE → not FEMALE
- (c) FEMALE → not MALE
- (d) MALE → ANIMATE
- (e) FEMALE → ANIMATE.

The implicational rules will help us to create a redundancy-free entry like (a) and bring it to its fully specified form (b) :

- (a) *boy* : HUMAN and MALE and not ADULT
- (b) *boy* : ANIMATE and HUMAN and MALE and not FEMALE and not ADULT.

Obviously, rules of this type not only simplify the various dictionary specifications but also enunciate relevant generalizations about the semantic structure of the vocabulary described.

29. We follow here M. Bierwisch, "Semantics", in Lyons (ed.), *New Horizons in Linguistics* (Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 166-84. Bierwisch is one of the foremost exponents of componential analysis.

We may now, in the light of the above discussions, define the meaning of a word as the complex of semantic components joined together by means of logical constants. This definition will make it possible for us to outline the different semantic properties and the relations of lexemes. In the sentence, "He was looking for the charger," the lexical item *charger* is ambiguous because more than one group of semantic features can be assigned to it. To take another example, the lexemes A_1 and A_2 are said to be synonymous if their meaning consists of the same components connected together by logical constants; they are hyponymous if the meaning of A_1 includes all the components of A_2 but not vice versa; thus *woman* can be the hyponym of "adult" inasmuch as the former contains the component FEMALE but not the latter. Two lexemes are antonymous if their meanings include a particular set of mutually exclusive components.

Relations between lexemes are indefinitely more than the ones indicated here; thus there is the relation between part and whole, and such lexical entries as *finger*, *hand*, and *arm* denoting parts of the human body, can be subsumed under the component HUMAN; *argue*, *reason*, and *think* are combinable only with a subject that includes the just mentioned component; *drink*, *sip*, and *spill* require an object containing the component LIQUID.

Special mention must be made here of the relationship components which can best be illustrated with the help of kinship terms, and the component in this case can be X PARENT OF Y, and its inverse relation Y CHILD OF X. From this we can obtain the following lexical entries :

- (a) *father* : X PARENT OF Y and MALE X
- (b) *mother* : X PARENT OF Y and FEMALE X
- (c) *son* : X CHILD OF Y and MALE X
- (d) *brother* : X CHILD OF PARENT OF Y and MALE X.

The last entry can be made explicit as follows :

X CHILD OF PARENT OF Y = def there is a Z such that X
CHILD OF Z and Z PARENT OF Y and $X \neq Y$.

In the present statement *def* means "equals by definition." Since PARENT OF involves ANIMATE and ADULT, we get the following formula ;

X PARENT OF → (ANIMATE X and ANIMATE Y and
ADULT X)

This statement can be expanded in the following way :

father : X PARENT OF Y and MALE X and (ANIMATE X
and ADULT X and ANIMATE Y)

The components enclosed within brackets specify the selection restrictions implied by *father* : if it occurs as a predicate noun, it requires an animate subject. This fact is highlighted by the sentence *This pen is John's father.*

Adjectives like *long, high, wide, etc.*, as well as their antonyms *short, low, and narrow* involve relational components, though these are less obvious than the ones indicated in the foregoing paragraphs. It has been pointed out³⁰ that *high* involves a special case of the comparative *higher than* an expected norm or standard of comparison. Accordingly, *This table is high* may be paraphrased as :

"This X is table and Y is the height of X and Y is greater than the normal value of Y."

The meaning of *high* includes two relational components, namely, Y HEIGHT of X, and Y GREATER THAN Z (or the basic norm of the adjective in the positive degree).

In the examples so far considered the components have been connected together with the help of the logical constant *and*, but there are lexemes which do not allow of this procedure. For the sake of illustration let us take the verb *have* as it occurs in the sentence "The child has many dolls," which can easily be reduced to the single component X HAVE Y. The meaning of *give* in "John gives the child many dolls" can, in this case, be analysed as Z CAUSE

30. By the great American linguist E. Sapir, *Selected Writings in Language, Culture and Personality* (Berkeley, Cal., 1944), p. 93,

(X HAVE Y); CAUSE is, then, a component, whose argument³¹ is a whole sentence consisting of its own component with its argument. Several verbs have been analysed along these lines,³² but in this modest study it is not possible to give even a brief account of the work that has been done.

We have hitherto been studying lexemes, the internal structure of their meanings, and the various relations arising from this internal structure, but since semantics involves the meaning of sentences, the question involves consideration of their syntactic structure. The answer to the question has been given by Chomsky in his very comprehensive theory of syntax.³³ As far as we are concerned, what is of importance is the fact that a lexeme embodies a phonological representation, some syntactic and morphological features, and finally a semantic representation: here we have the deep structure, which can be transformed into relevant surface structures by rules proper to the individual languages, and then be given a phonetic representation. A semantically valid representation of a sentence is to be derived from the syntactic deep structures through certain operations that can combine the lexical elements of a deep structure in accordance with the appropriate syntactic relations. Concretely, how is this done?

Of the several proposals put forward the most likely seems to be the one that operates in terms of referential indices or constituents, namely, constituents of sentences which refer to objects rather than describe them, and can, therefore, be marked out with an index (say, an arbitrary number). Once this postulate of referential indices is admitted, the semantic interpretation of a given deep structure can be done in two ways. First, the interpreter can relate the semantic components with the help of appropriate arguments; second, the meanings of the individual words are connected by logical constants, especially *and*. We can thus obtain (b) as the semantic interpretation of (a):

(a) [[the boy]_{NP}, [kills [the dog]_{NP}, [VP] S

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31. A technical term in use in logic and mathematics, argument stands for one of the elements in a given relation: thus in $6 > 5$, the relation "being greater than" holds between the elements 6 and 5. In "John is Mary's father", the relation "being the father of" holds between the arguments "John" and "Mary". For details, cf. Lyons, *Semantics* I, pp. 146, 149f.
32. Examples in Bierwisch, "Semantics", pp. 175-77 (where appeal is made to E. H. Nendix, *Componential Analysis of General Vocabulary: The Semantic Structure of a Set of Verbs in English, Hindi and Japanese* [The Hague, 1966]).
33. Cf. n. 6 above.

- (b) HUMAN X_1 and MALE X_1 and not ADULT X_1 and X_1
Cause (X_2 CHANGE TO (not ALIVE X_2)) and ANIMATE
 X_2 and DOG X_2 .

On close inspection of (b) we see that the whole representation is, in the final analysis, an instance of the application of the principles of formal logic: the universally valid rules of logic are applicable to semantic representations in natural languages.³⁴

We shall bring this section to a close with a few words about the way in which sentences are related, through the meaning they convey, to states, processes and objects in the world. Two problems are involved here, the mechanism of reference, and the interpretation of the semantic components. As for the mechanism of reference, it may be said that semantic representations of the type given in the present study include referentially indexed arguments, which are themselves variables pointing to possible sets of objects.³⁵ The theory of semantics rests upon the possibility of reference, namely, of sentences to specific objects and situations, while the representation of objects is not part of the semantic structure of language. As for components, they are only formal elements expressing the relations between semantic structures. Some authorities go to the extent of regarding them as universals which are realized in all the languages of the world, while others reduce them to the basic dispositions of the organs of cognition, but not all linguists will endorse these positions.³⁶

II

What bearing has semantics, the science of meaning on hermeneutics, the theory and practice of interpretation? As is recognized by all authorities, both these disciplines are part of that totality which specialists call *Geisteswissenschaften*,³⁷ for they are concerned with

34. Bierwisch, "Semantics", p. 179.

35. "Reference" is a technical term in linguistics, signifying the relationships between linguistic expressions and the persons or objects they designate (or identify). Different expressions may include the same reference, as, for example, in "Kafka" and "the author of 'The Castle.'" For details, cf. Lyons, *Semantics* I, pp. 177-97.

36. Lyons, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-33. We wish to recall here the fact that though componential analysis is now generally recognized as a fruitful approach to the study of meaning, its validity has been challenged in some quarters; the psychological reality of sense components, and also their universal validity have been called into question (Lyons, *ibid.*, pp. 333f.).

37. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 5-10.

the interpretation of human experience in all its comprehensiveness. Basically, human experience is the sum-total or cumulus of the responses man, the free agent, gives to the stimuli he receives from his own self, the world, and the beyond or transcendence. In a *viva voce* or oral communication of an experience that X has just had, use is made of the *viva vox*: there takes place a vocal communication through words, whose meaning is most of the time quite clear, with the result that there is not much room for the practice of interpretation. If it happens that the meaning intended is not clear, the hearer can question X and get from him the necessary clarification.

We now hasten to add that the modern linguist who follows the synchronic method of approach to language, is interested in the *viva vox*, in the actual, living language through which communication of experiences takes place. This remark is true also of the modern science of semantics. As a matter of fact, specialists in componential analysis restrict their investigations to the synchronic sphere, and the examples they adduce are all part of what we may classify as the vocabulary of the bourgeois gentlemen of the twentieth century! This is certainly a very narrow area of research, for human experience is far more complex than what can be covered by the synchronic method.

It should never be forgotten that human experience stretches back into the remotest past,³⁸ and the cumulus or sum-total of this experience of the past is what constitutes human history, such as is found recorded in the written and unwritten documents of antiquity. The archaeologist, for example, works with the unwritten sources in an endeavour to reconstruct the *Geistesgeschichte* of the bygone ages,³⁹ but his special line of research is not of any importance for us: our interest is in the written records of the experiences of the generations of men and women

38. Human experience is also a thing of the future, but this aspect does not fall within the historian's field of investigation, and, strictly speaking, he does not take into account contemporary experience as well, the study of which forms the discipline known as *Zeitgeschichte*. For a good introduction to the problem, cf. P. Kern-J. Leuschner, *Einführung in die Geschichtswissenschaft* (Sammlung Götschen 270/270a, 5th ed., Berlin, 1968). B. Scheurig, *Einführung in die Zeitgeschichte* (Sammlung Götschen 1204, Berlin, 1962).

39. As a model work in this field we may cite F. Cornelius, *Geistesgeschichte der Frühzeit*. I. *Von der Eiszeit bis zur Erfindung der Keilschrift*. II/1. *Die Flusskulturen des Orients von der Erfindung der Keilschrift bis zum Auftreten der Indogermanen*. II/2. *Der Aufstieg der Indogermanen und der Orient bis zum Untergang des Hethiterreiches* (Leiden, 1960, 1962, 1967),

who have gone before us, yes, records that form the precious, invaluable legacy they have left us.

When the interpreter of human experience has before him the written documents of the past, he has to have recourse to diachronic or historical linguistics, a remarkable science that developed in the wake of the West's discovery of Sanskrit.⁴⁰ Historical linguists, or philologists, as they are commonly known, have produced excellent grammars⁴¹ and dictionaries⁴² which are of the utmost value to the interpreter of ancient texts. How fruitful the diachronic approach to the interpretation of the written documents of antiquity can be how valuable it can be for the reconstruction of the *Geistesgeschichte* of the past which has long since been dead, may be gauged from the works of such eminent scholars as E. Benveniste,⁴³ A. Scherer,⁴⁴ F. Solmsen,⁴⁵ F. Specht,⁴⁶ P. Thieme⁴⁷ and a host of others.

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40. W. P. Lehmann, *A Reader in Nineteenth-Century Historical Indo-European Linguistics* (Bloomington, Ind., 1967). This book contains extracts from studies by the masters of the last century. Cf. too H. Pedersen *The Discovery of Language. Linguistic Science in the 19th Century* (Ibid., 1962).
 41. K. Brugmann-B. Dellbrück, *Grundriss der vergleichenden Grammatik der indogermanischen Sprachen* (5 vols. in 9 parts, repr., Berlin, 1967). A new work that incorporates the latest findings in J. Kurylowicz, *Indogermanische Grammatik* (4 vols., Indogermanische Bibliothek. I. Reihe: Lehrund Handbücher Heidelberg, 1968ff.).
 42. C. D. Buck, *A Dictionary of Selected Synonyms in the Principal Indo-European Languages. A Contribution to the History of Ideas* (repr., Chicago, 1965), J. Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (2 vols., Bern, 1969). This work supersedes the earlier dictionary, A. Walde-J. Pokorny, *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der indogermanischen Sprachen* (3 vols., Leipzig, 1928-33).
 43. Benveniste, *Indo-European Society and Language* (London, 1973). An earlier work of the same scholar (published in 1966) is *Problems of General Linguistics* (Miami Linguistic Series 8, Miami, 1971), which includes a number of studies bearing on the history of culture.
 44. Scherer, *Gestirnamen bei den indogermanischen Völkern* (Indogermanische Bibliothek. III. Reihe: Untersuchungen, Heidelberg, 1953). Cf. too the same scholar's article "Soziologisches über Sternnamen", *Antiquitates indogermanicae. Studien zur indogermanischen Altertumskunde und zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte. Gedenkschrift für Hermann Güntert* (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Sprachwissenschaft 12, Innsbruck, 1974), pp. 185-92.
 45. Solmsen, *Indogermanische Eigennamen als Spiegel der Kulturgeschichte* (Indogermanische Bibliothek., Heidelberg, 1922).
 46. Specht, *Der Ursprung der indogermanischen Deklination* (repr., Göttingen, 1974), pp. 1-113 ("Die idg. Deklination—ein Spiegelbild der idg. Kultur").
 47. Thieme, *Kleine Schriften* (2 vols., Glasenapp-Stiftung V/1-2, Wiesbaden, 1971). In the works cited in nn. 43-47 etymological research occupies a prominent

We shall try to illustrate the point in question with the help of an example.⁴⁸ Indo-Iranian attests the base *bhag-*, "to share", whence is derived the Indo-Aryan substantive *bhagaḥ*, "luck, what falls to one's share, possession"; as the agent who distributes possessions there is the person of *bhagaḥ*, "lord, dispenser," a god who was worshipped in the Vedic age.⁴⁹ That the Iranians too had a god-dispenser is clear from Avestan *bagha-*, Old Persian *baga-*, etc., terms which, specifically mean "God" (cf. too Old Slavic *bogj*, "God" actually a loanword from Iranian), Russian *bogatj*, "rich", *u-bogj*, "non-rich, poor" etc.).⁵⁰ A further development of the root *bhag-* is represented by Sanskrit *bhakṣayati*, "eats, drinks, devours", for what has been given by the powers on high to man as his share, he also enjoys! Here belongs too Avestan *baxta-*, "fate, that which is determined, Schicksalsbestimmung." Now the Indo-European languages of the West presuppose a root *ai-*, "to share, give", which attests a semantic evolution similar to that of *bhag-*, in Indo-Iranian (cf. its derivatives Oscan *aiz*, "possession", Greek *aisa*, "share, lot", *ainumai*, "to take hold of," Umbrian *esono-*, "divinus, sacer", and Marrucian *aisos*, "gods".) Evidently, the semantic evolution here outlined is of great interest to Somen one who wishes to study the religious thought of the ancient Indo-Europeans, and the investigation he will be making also involves hermeneutics or interpretation, which, we say, is an eminently linguistic act.⁵¹

It is when we come to the sacred writings of antiquity, or more specifically, the sacred scriptures of the great religions of the world that we feel, most acutely, the need of the hermeneutic operation. The scriptures arose in a world that was wholly different from that of

place. For further investigation on these lines, cf. R. Schmidt (ed.), *Etymologie* (Wege der Forschung 373, Darmstadt, 1977); this work includes studies by Kluge, von Wartburg, Thurneysen and others. To illustrate the importance of etymology we give here an example taken at random: Italian and Spanish attest the word *burro*, and while in the former the meaning is "butter", in the latter it means "donkey!" The etymologist will tell us that the Italian substantive is a derivative of Latin *butyrum*, "butter", and the Spanish one of Greek *purrhos*, "red."

48. J. Knobloch, "Osk. *aiz*, 'Vermögen' und die Beteiligung mit irdischen Gütern", *Antiquitates indogermanicae*, pp. 349-51.
49. Brief discussion in A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (Grundriss der indoarischen Philologie und Altertumskunde III/1A, repr., Delhi, 1974), pp. 45f.
50. Cf. G. Jouquois, "V Sl. *bogatj*, 'riche', *bogj*, 'dieu' et apparentés, *Die Sprache* 11 (1965) pp. 131-35. J. Rudnychkyi, "Slavonic Terms for 'god'", *Antiquitates indogermanicae*, pp. 111f.
51. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 346-66.

the religious-minded man of the twentieth century, and they make use of a language that is altogether alien to him. Put somewhat differently, the patterns or models of thought and expressions of the scriptures are so different from those of the present that modern man finds it difficult to perceive in them meanings and values for life. Historical linguistics⁵² will of course help him to gain a deeper, objective understanding of the text which, we must never forget, is itself a document of ancient history, a record of the experience of transcendence that had been had by his ancestors. A purely historical understanding will of course be sufficient for the professional historian who has no interest in the bearing the scriptures have on the pious man's life, and can, therefore, adopt a detached attitude, an attitude which does not get involved with values.

The objective historian's work is itself a true hermeneutical activity, for, after all, what is understanding? As the late Assyriologist Benno Landsberger pointed out more than half a century ago, "Jedes Verstehen ist zunächst ein In-Beziehung-Setzen der fremden zu meiner eigenen Welt."⁵³ Understanding consists, accordingly, in the activity of relating an alien world to one's own, and this is basically a linguistic act whose essence lies in the adequate manipulation of language, the tool *par excellence* of interpretation and communication:⁵⁴ with the help of language man creates models of reference (or referential models) which will enable him to translate into intelligible language the meaning of the ancient texts he has before him.

It is not possible to dwell here on the nature, legitimacy and significance of referential models⁵⁵, and for our purpose suffice it to note that they are the bridge that leads us to the world of ancient texts, a world that is altogether strange to us. As for the sacred texts which have come to us from antiquity, we need referential models to understand them. They have not only signification which a purely objective approach can disclose, but also a significance for the life and activity of the pious man who finds himself in a concrete situation, say,

52. On the part this discipline has to play in the study of the ancient Orient, cf. W. Eilers, *Die vergleichend-semasiologische Methode in der Orientalistik* (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur zu Mainz, Geistes- und sozialwissenschaftliche Klasse, Wiesbaden, 1973).

53. Cf. his paper, "Die Eigenbegrifflichkeit der babylonischen Welt", *Islamica*, 2 (1926), pp. 355-72 (reprinted as "Libelli", vol. 142 [Darmstadt, 1957] p. 3).

54. Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 358-66.

55. We may also say "paradigms".

of fear and anxiety, of despair and despondency, of joy and hilarity, of devotion and euphoria. The purpose of scriptural hermeneutics is to refer the ancient texts to our concrete situation (whatever be its nature), so that they become relevant to this specific moment of our existence, and it is the referential models that render it possible for us to perceive the significance of the scriptures for life.

Making use of modern jargon, we may say that the scriptures, belonging as they do to a world that is bygone, remain "parole parlée, verbum dictum", that is, dead word (of course, as far as modern man is concerned), and it is through the linguistic activity of hermeneutical translation into the language of the actual moment that they become "parole parlante, verbum dicens"—the living word that speaks to man here and now. Hermeneutics makes, then, the dead word living, and causes it to communicate to us the message of salvation.

Modern semantics has a great role to play in our work of creating models. By having a full grasp of the meanings of the words that we use, and of the way in which they are related to the world, we will be in a position to perform the linguistic act involved in our work of relating the text of a bygone world to our own. Teachers of religion are the ones who have to engage in this hermeneutical activity. The sermons in the synagogues, churches and mosques, the discourses on the Vedas, the Gītā, etc., in the Hindu temples, and the expounding of *buddhavacanam* in the Buddhist communities are all hermeneutical activities, and the numerous books published by scholars professing one or the other of the religions of today bear out the fact that thinking men are aware of the part hermeneutics has to play in keeping alive their respective faiths.

The present study has been a purely theoretical one, focussing the attention, for the most part, on the theory and practice of componential analysis. Unfortunately, specialists in the history of religions are not always competent linguists, and what is still worse, they may even label linguistics and the cognate sciences as mere jugglery. As a science whose ultimate purpose is to describe man's conceptualization or *Verbegrifflichung* of the world *in specie*,⁵⁶ diachronic linguistics has its place of honour in the humanities, and this is also true of synchronic

56. On this point, cf. J. Lohmann, "Der Sinn der indogermanischen Etymologie," *Kratylos* 10 (1965), pp. 79-88 (according to whom the purpose of etymological study is to describe "die Geschichte der Verbegrifflichung der Welt in einzelnen").

linguistics, and its important branch semantics. The teacher of religion who is equipped with adequate knowledge of these two fields of linguistic science will be fully qualified in creating referential models and paradigms, in order to convert the "parole parlée" into a "parole parlante." In this way he will perform the hermeneutical task incumbent upon him by virtue of the call he has received to be a teacher of the way that leads to man's ultimate goal.