

THE SEMANTIC ARCHITECTURE OF THE FRENCH NUCLEAR VERBAL LEXICON: ANALYSIS OF THE DIMENSION PARLER BEAUCOUP

Isabel NEGRO ALOUSQUE¹
Universidad Complutense

INTRODUCTION

In this paper² we shall explain the codification of the semantic architecture of the French nuclear verbal lexicon through the analysis of the dimension *Parler beaucoup* within the semantic domain of SPEECH. Starting from the assumption that the lexicon constitutes a structured whole and that the dimension is the central level of lexical description, we will analyse this dimension following the Functional-Lexematic model elaborated by Martín Mingorance (1984; 1985a,b; 1987a,b,c; 1990). This model integrates Coseriu's *Lexematics* (1977) and Dik's *Functional Grammar* (1978a), and consists of four levels of lexical analysis: *paradigmatic, syntagmatic, pragmatic, and cognitive*.

THE PARADIGMATIC ANALYSIS

The paradigmatic axis is concerned with the semantic description of the lexemes according to the principles of opposition and functionality. The lexemes are grouped under semantic domains,³ which are in turn divided into dimensions⁴ following the postulates of Coseriu's *Lexematics*. Each

-
1. Departamento de Filología Inglesa I (Lengua y Lingüística Inglesa), Facultad de Filología, Universidad Complutense. isana@eresmas.net
 2. This paper is part of the research carried out in the project «Desarrollo de una lógica léxica para la traducción asistida por ordenador a partir de una base de datos léxica inglés-francés-español-alemán multifuncional y reutilizable», funded by DGICYT, code number PB 94/0437.
 3. The following semantic fields can be distinguished (Faber and Mairal 1992): EXISTENCE, MOVEMENT, POSITION, CHANGE, PERCEPTION, FEELING, COGNITION, POSSESSION, SPEECH, SOUND, and GENERAL ACTION.
 4. This structural level is described by Geckeler (1977). A dimension can be thought of as a viewpoint of lexical articulation which operates in a lexical field and activates oppositions between certain lexemes within that field.

dimension subsumes a set of semantically closed lexemes and represents an area of meaning within the general concept embodied by the domain.

The paradigmatic organization of the dimension *Parler beaucoup* goes as follows:

bavarder: parler beaucoup.

tailler une bavette: parler beaucoup (fam.).

babiller: bavarder d'une façon futile/enfantine.

jaser: babiller sans arrêt.

papoter: bavarder d'une façon futile.

jacasser: bavarder d'une façon futile à voix haute.

caqueter: bavarder d'une façon indiscrète et intempestive (fam.).

discourir: bavarder sur le même sujet.

baratiner: bavarder pour circonvenir qqn (pop.).

causer: parler trop, avec indiscretion et légèreté.

The archilexeme of the dimension is *bavarder*, whose definiens labels the dimension and enters into the definition of all the lexemes except for *jaser* and *causer*. The verb *jaser* is defined in terms of the previously defined non-nuclear word *babiller*.

The semantic parameters which traverse this dimension are those of manner and purpose (in the case of *baratiner*). The lexemes are further differentiated by pragmatic features (cf. pragmatic axis below).

The method used in the elaboration of the meaning definitions is Dik's *Stepwise Lexical Decomposition* (1978b), according to which each lexeme is made up of an information nucleus, the *definiens*, and a set of relevant features which mark the distance from the other members of the dimension and the field. The lexical unit which constitutes the act nucleus of the dimension is the *archilexeme*. Then, Faber and Mairal (1994: 13-14) claim that «lexical dimensions in each field are established in terms of oppositions formulated from the definitional structure of the lexical units. These oppositions characterize both the internal structure of the dimension in question as well as the lexical structure of the items that it contains. Lexical dimensions are thus directly derived from the definitional structure of lexical units».

On the other hand, the elaboration of meaning definitions on the basis of hierarchical semantic relations ensures the validity of definitions in that these contain the maximum degree of information with the maximum degree of economy in definitions.

THE SYNTAGMATIC ANALYSIS

On the syntagmatic axis we specify the syntactic patterns of the predicates in the dimension adopting Dik's predicate frames model as a notational device (1978b). The predicate frames are formal structures including these types of information:

- (i) The form of the predicate
- (ii) The syntactic category to which it belongs
- (iii) Its quantitative valency,⁵ i.e. the number of arguments that the predicate requires.
- (iv) Its qualitative valency, i.e. the semantic functions of the arguments and the selection restrictions holding for them.
- (v) Meaning definition

Predicate frames describe a state of affairs and specify the relationship between the predicate arguments (represented by the variable x). Each argument is characterized by a selection restriction –described in terms of binary semantic features– and fulfils a semantic function (Agent, Force, Experiencer, Goal, Recipient, etc.).

Consider the predicate frame of the verb *prononcer*:

$[(x_1; \text{prototyp. human})_{\text{Ag}} (x_2; \text{prototyp. -concrete} \in \text{sounds, letters, words})_{\text{Go}}]_{\text{Action}}$

This frame describes an Action (a state of affairs defined by the parameters [+control, +dynamism] and specifies the relationship between a human argument, performing the function of Agent, and an argument fulfilling the function of Goal and semantically marked as [-concrete].

Two syntactic patterns govern the dimension *Parler beaucoup*:

1. SV

It is the central syntactic pattern operating in this dimension. The predicate frame for this government pattern has the following reading:

$[(x_1; \text{prototyp. human})_{\text{Ag}}]_{\text{Action}}$

This frame designates an Action qualified by an Agent argument, prototypically human.

The following verbs activate this predication: *bavarder, tailler une bavette, babiller, jaser, papoter, jacasser, caqueter* and *causer*.

- (1) Elle m'ennuie, elle ne fait que babiller.
- (2) Les commères du village aimaient caqueter.

A few predicates (*bavarder, papoter, jacasser, caqueter, causer*) may encode a satellite argument fulfilling the semantic function of Time:

$[(x_1; \text{prototyp. human})_{\text{Ag}} (y_1; \text{prototyp. time})_{\text{Ti}}]_{\text{Action}}$

- (3) Christine a jacassé pendant tout le trajet.

5. Following Sommers (1984: 508), «valency is concerned with relationships between the verbal predicate and the other elements making up a predication. These elements divide up into those which are closely associated with the predicate, termed «complements», and the rest, termed «adjuncts». This distinction correlates with Dik's distinction between arguments and satellites.

2. SVO

The predicate frame for this complementation pattern has the following form:

$[(x_1: \text{prototyp. human})_{\text{Ag}} (x_2: \text{prototyp. -concrete} \in \text{topic})_{\text{Go}}]_{\text{Action}}$

This predication also describes an Action and specifies the relationship between a subject argument, prototypically human, which performs the semantic function of Agent, and an object argument fulfilling the function of Goal and semantically marked as «topic».

The object argument can be instantiated by a noun phrase (*baratiner*) or a prepositional phrase introduced by *de* (*bavarder, discourir, causer*).

(4) Le camelot avait sorti son étalage et il baratinaït les passants.

(5) Ils ont longtemps discouru des problèmes de l'entreprise.

The verbs *bavarder, discourir* and *causer* may be further qualified by a time satellite:

$[(x_1: \text{prototyp. human})_{\text{Ag}} (x_2: \text{prototyp. -concrete} \in \text{topic})_{\text{Go}} (y_1: \text{prototyp. time})_{\text{Ti}}]_{\text{Action}}$

(6) Nous avons causé de choses et d'autres pendant une heure.

THE PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

The pragmatic axis deals with the meaning components that provide information about the communicative situation and about the way in which speakers perceive and evaluate the world. In this light, it is safe to affirm that most lexical models focus on descriptive meaning, neglecting subjective and connotative factors. However, in Lyons' terms (1977), words also carry social and affective meaning.

There exist different kinds of pragmatic classemes. The verbs under this dimension lexicalize the violation of three of Grice's Conversational Maxims (1975):

1. Quantity: give the right amount of information.
2. Quality: try to make your contribution one that is true.
3. Relation: be relevant.

The lexeme *jaser* focalises the speech's length, thus violating the first maxim. The focus of *baratiner* is the purpose of speech (to deceive the hearer), thus breaking the second maxim; and the verbs *babiller, papoter, jacasser* and *discourir* highlight the feature of the topic (triviality or invariability), thus violating the third maxim.

In addition, the lexemes *tailler une bavette, caqueter* and *baratiner* codify diastatic features (i.e. information relative to register and stylistic variations) in that they are colloquial words.

THE COGNITIVE ANALYSIS

The description of the cognitive axis is based on the idea that semantic structure reflects conceptual structure.⁶ Then, starting from the postulate that each semantic domain represents a basic conceptual category, we can arrive at the formulation of conceptual schemata. Faber and Mairal (1998: 19) define conceptual schemata in these terms:

A schema is a modular, dynamic characterization that subsumes linguistic symbolic units obtained in a bottom-to-top fashion through the activation of lower-level schemata. These schemata are linguistically motivated and reflect our understanding of reality.

Modular means that a given schemata includes a number of opposing subschemata. *Dynamic* suggests that cognitive schemata are linked to other schemata. *Linguistic* entails that the units which define a cognitive schemata obtain from semantic structure.

Conceptual schemata are encoded in the lexicon at three structuring levels: lexeme, dimension and field. In this paper we will concentrate on the dimensional level.

The linguistic encoding of the dimensional-level schemata includes the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic components of language.

The semantic component is defined by the major semantic parameters that permeate the dimension. As advanced above, the lexemes within this dimension are elaborated in terms of manner and purpose.

Further, these differentiation patterns may lexicalize pragmatic factors in dimensional-level schemata. The dimensional-level schemata *Parler beaucoup* lexicalizes the deviation from the sociocultural norm relative to the correct way of speaking. The descriptive parameters of the verbs falling in this dimension include those related to pitch, topic, duration, speaker's attitude and speaker's intention:

[pitch]: *jacasser* (loudly).

[topic]: *babiller*, *papoter*, *jacasser* (trivial topic); *discourir* (same topic).

[duration]: *jaser* (continuously).

[speaker's attitude]: *caqueter* (indiscretion).

[speaker's intention]: *baratiner* (to speak for the purpose of deceiving).

The syntactic component of dimensional-level schemata is determined by the syntactic realizations of the verbs in the dimension. As already explained, the prototypical complementation patterns of the predicates in this dimension are SV and SVO (NP).

The pragmatic characterization of dimensional-level schemata is provided by pragmatic elements. The classeme of axiological evaluation

6. The argument that semantic structure reflects conceptual structure is found in Faber (1994a), Faber & Mairal (1994, 1998), Faber & Pérez (1993) and Lakoff (1987).

operates indirectly in the dimensional-level schemata *Parler beaucoup* in that the whole dimension encompasses the violation of a sociocultural rule. The fact that the lexemes *jacasser* and *caqueter* encode primarily a subject argument semantically marked as animal gives proof of this.

On the other hand, dimensional-level schemata lexicalize conceptual parameters. We should note that a conceptual parameter can subsume various dimensional-level schemata. These parameters of categorization, in conjunction with the archilexemes of the domain, define the field-level schemata from an intra-field perspective.

Below we present the categorizing parameters permeating the domain of SPEECH:

Dimension 1: Speaking as making a sound.

- 1.1. *Dire qqch d'une certaine façon*
- 1.2. *Dire qqch d'une façon peu distincte*
- 1.3. *Parler beaucoup*
- 1.4. *Dire qqch d'une voix forte/d'une façon brusque*
- 1.5. *Manifester son mécontentement*

These dimensional schemata codify SPEECH as the production of a sound. This accounts for the domain overlap of SPEECH with SOUND.

Dimension 2: Speaking as assessing the degree of occurrence of an action or event.

- 2.1. *Dire que qqch est vrai*
- 2.2. *Dire que qqch va se produire*

This conceptual parameter links SPEECH to COGNITION. Most verbs in these dimensional-level schemata refer to both the action of articulating one's judging and to the mental activity of judging.

Dimension 3: Speaking as inducing a course of action on the part of the speaker or the hearer.

- 3.1. *Dire oui à qqch*
- 3.2. *Dire qu'on fera qqch*
- 3.3. *Ne pas accepter qqch / Dire non à qqch*
- 3.4. *Dire à qqn qu'un mal peut lui arriver*
- 3.5. *Dire à qqn de faire qqch*
- 3.6. *Dire qqch à qqn pour obtenir qqch*

These dimensional schemata describe the *illocutionary* or *perlocutionary* force of utterances (Austin 1962). This suggests that the speaker performs an act *in* saying something (illocutionary act) or *by* saying something (perlocutionary act). As a matter of fact, the verbs under these dimensions are performative in the sense of constituting a form of action (illocutionary force); further the lexemes belonging to the dimension *Dire à qqn de faire qqch* bring about a course of action on the part of the interlocutor (perlocutionary force).

Dimension 4: Speaking as expressing one's intellectual attitude

- 4.1. *Dire qqch d'une façon expresse*
- 4.2. *Parler favorablement de qqn/qqch*
- 4.3. *Dire qu'on n'est pas d'accord avec ce que qqn dit/pense*
- 4.4. *Porter un jugement défavorable sur qqn/qqch*
- 4.5. *Dire qqch pour faire rire aux dépens de qqn*

These dimensional schemata stress speech as the reflection of one's way of thinking.

Dimension 5: Speaking as a way of interacting with others

- 5.1. *Dire qqch à qqn sous forme de question pour obtenir une réponse/information*
- 5.2. *Dire qqch en réponse à*
- 5.3. *Parler de qqch longuement/en détail/de plusieurs points de vue*

Further, dimensional-level schemata are key to the delineation of the connections of a semantic domain with others, since it is via dimensional schemata that the relations between semantic domains are established:

Source domain	Path	Target domain
SPEECH	Dimensional-level schemata	SOUND COGNITION

The dimensional schemata *Parler beaucoup* links SPEECH to SOUND. This connection is specified in a semantic macronet:

1. SPEECH

1.1. SOUND:

- (i) *Parler beaucoup* [jacasser, caqueter]
- (ii) *Dire qqch d'une voix forte/d'une façon brusque* [crier, brailler, gueuler, hurler, vociférer, s'égosiller/s'époumoner]
- (iii) *Manifester son mécontentement* [grognier, se plaindre, gémir, se lamenter, geindre]

1.2. COGNITION:

- (i) *Dire que qqch est vrai / Dire oui à qqch* [accepter, admettre]

The connection of SPEECH with SOUND obtains though a metaphorical process («humans are animals»). Indeed, the lexemes *jacasser* and *caqueter* describe the sound produced by certain animals (magpies and hens, respectively). This explains why these verbs carry a negative axiological load.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the lexicon is not an inconsistent inventory of words, but a structured whole of semantically bound lexical items which are grouped under semantic domains, whose description integrates four levels of analysis: *paradigmatic*, *syntagmatic*, *pragmatic* and *cognitive*. In the

paradigmatic axis lexemes are arranged within semantic fields, while the elaboration of the syntagmatic axis entails the description of the complementation patterns of these lexemes. The pragmatic axis is concerned with the pragmatic information found in the lexical items, i.e. that information about the way in which speakers assess words. The last level of analysis is the cognitive axis. Starting from the assumption that semantic categories reflect conceptual categories, we may formulate conceptual schemata resulting from the relation between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes.

REFERENCES

- COSERIU, E. (1977), *Principios de semántica estructural*, Madrid: Gredos.
- DIK, S.C. (1978a), *Functional grammar*, Dordrecht, Foris Publications.
- DIK, S.C. (1978b), *Stepwise Lexical Decomposition*, Lisse, The Peter de Ridder Press.
- FABER, P. (1994a), «The semantic architecture of the lexicon: a study in the configuration of lexical fields», *Lexicographica*, Series Maior 57, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, 37-51.
- FABER, P. and MAIRAL, R. (1994), «Methodological underpinnings for the construction of a functional-lexicological model», *Miscelánea, A Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 15, 193-217.
- FABER, P. and MAIRAL, R. (1998), «Towards a typology of predicate schemata», in Wotjak, G. (ed.), *Functional Lexicology*, Peter Lang.
- FABER, P. AND PÉREZ, CH. (1993), «Image schemata and light: a study in contrastive lexical domains in English and Spanish», *Atlantis*, vol. XV-1-2, 117-135.
- GECKELER, H. (1977), *Semántica estructural y teoría del campo léxico*, Madrid, Gredos.
- LAKOFF, G. (1987), *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- LYONS, J. (1977), *Semantics. Volumes I and II*, Cambridge, University Press.
- MARTÍN MINGORANCE, L. (1984), «Lexical fields and Stepwise Lexical decomposition in a Contrastive English-Spanish verb Valency Dictionary», In R.R.K. Hartman (ed.), *LEXeter '83 Proceedings. Papers from the International Conference on Lexicography at Exeter*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 226-236.
- MARTÍN MINGORANCE, L. (1990), «Functional grammar and lexematics in lexicography», in J. Tomaszczyk and B. Lewandoska-Tomaszczyk (eds.), *Meaning and Lexicography*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 227- 253.
- MARTÍN MINGORANCE, L. (1990), «Léxico y sintaxis en la gramática funcional de S.C.Dik», *Cuadernos de Investigación Filológica*, Logroño, CUL.
- SOMMERS, H.L. (1984), «On the validity of the complement-adjunct distinction in valency grammar», *Linguistics* 22, 507-530.