

A functional description of semantic relationships*

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For the last few years we have been in charge of a project on semantic relationships¹, which deals with the most important problems of lexical semantics as a whole, that requires a meticulous revision of its theoretical concepts and an extreme accuracy in their application. Moreover, as far as we know, nobody has undertaken a comprehensive study of one or more natural languages with a practical application of these concepts from a contrastive point of view.

Regarding certain general considerations about the linguistic characterization of those so called *lexical relationships*, we can say, first of all, that many semanticists have included polysemy or homonymy among them, because they have tried to find a relation between signs or between the meanings of polysemic or homonymic signs, just as there is a relation between the meanings of synonymous or para-synonymous signs (semantic identity or similitude), hyponyms (inclusion or semantic subordination) and antonyms (semantic opposition between graded, complementary or converse terms).

It should be stressed that the fact that these so called polysemic and homonymic "relationships" are only different from the diachronic point of view must be stated in detail. As technical formulations, they are the same phenomenon synchronically, despite those who, from this same perspective, try to establish a difference between both processes, mainly by establishing some sort of semantic relationship (generally of a subjective, associative or

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psychological nature) between their meanings². This is due to the fact that, from this point of view, the etymological source (whether it is different or not) of polysemic or homonymic words makes no difference. We can reserve, though, the term *polysemy* (or better yet, *homonymy*) for the formal characterization of the coincidence of *signifiants* in the material expression, which can produce textual ambiguous occurrences in speech. The task is therefore to designate a mere formal problem, non-existent from the point of view of the relation *signifiant-signifié*, in the sense of a symmetrical consideration of the sign, proposed from an extended concept of *signifiant* (Casas Gómez 1999b:46-58). This is due to the fact that polysemy or homonymy does not exist in the language system, since those *signifiants* would amount to different signs -of homonymic expression- whose meanings establish also different paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships. The same conclusion is reached through the theory of syntactic-semantic schemes, whose linguistic methodology has proved, from a strictly synchronic perspective, its usefulness for the homonymical delimitation of different linguistic signs which have different meanings, although related to the same *signifiant*. In his work on syntactic-semantic schemes of attributive verbs in Spanish, I. Penadés Martínez (1994:203-204) concludes, in a specific section dedicated to the differentiation of homonyms, that "las distinciones llevadas a cabo en, por ejemplo, *poner*₁, *poner*₂ y *poner*₃ deben entenderse como distinciones que se corresponden con la existencia de signos lingüísticos distintos, con significados diferentes, y ello por la única y exclusiva razón de exigir una combinatoria sintagmática particular en cada caso. De este modo, la combinatoria sintagmática de una unidad se constituye en criterio delimitador de significados distintos y, por tanto, de signos lingüísticos, unidades de lengua, unidades del sistema, diferentes"³.

From this point of view, homonymy, traditionally imputed to the

² A revision of the authors sharing this synchronic point of view, in which polysemy and homonymy are distinguished by means of affinity or not (presence or absence of common features) can be found in M. Casas Gómez/M^a D. Muñoz Núñez (1992: 136-139) and M^a D. Muñoz Núñez (1996b: 89-127).

³ I. Penadés Martínez (1994: 203). In previous works on the adjective, especially in the one related to its semantic classification (1991: 197-198), this author outlined the syntagmatic delimitation of homonymic signs regarding *changes in the application* of the adjective *seco* by means of its contextual use. For an analysis of the inclusion of this polysemic *signifiant* in different semantic paradigms, its distinct antonymic relations, its changes in application and figurative senses, see Casas Gómez (1999b: 53-54,n.32).

hearer's perspective, implicates the speaker as well, because, if homonyms constitute different signs in the system, the speaker must choose which of these signs -which have different *signifiant* but homonymic expression- is the one he uses in his communicative act. This highlights, on the other hand, the not so sharp distinction between onomasiology and semasiology and the semantic aspects implied in such methods of analysis, which is the case of synonymy, polysemy or homonymy and, especially, of euphemism, a phenomenon pertaining to the synonymic sphere, whose process will not function unless speaking and listening codes are equalized. Therefore, it is not enough that euphemistic or dysphemistic communication can be solved by the listener, but it must also be perceived as such by both the speaker and the listener (Casas Gómez 1995a:19,n.10 and especially 1993b:81-84).

We cannot even consider the existence of polysemic expressions in discourse in the strict sense, because the listener normally decodes the different possibilities (through context-supplied data and pragmatic situation) and solves the problem selecting one, or more than one, interpretation among the several possibilities (S. Gutiérrez Ordóñez 1989: 137), so that what then exists in the context, generally made available or sought intentionally by the speaker, is simply *ambiguity* in utterances, generated by polysemy or homonymy acting at different linguistic levels (in this sense, rather than *phonic ambiguity*, *syntagmatic-syntactic ambiguity*, *syntagmatic-semantic ambiguity* or *lexical ambiguity* (S. Gutiérrez Ordóñez 1981: 231-235 and 1989: 139-141), we should speak of *phonetic homonymy*, *lexical homonymy*, *sub-sentence syntactic-semantic*⁴ *homonymy* and *syntactic-semantic sentence homonymy*, which pragmatically create ambiguous utterances). The above-mentioned ambiguity in utterances can also be generated by a certain type of semiological sign (as in *iconic* ambiguities) and, most of all, by a great variety of pragmatic aspects (reviewed thoroughly by S. Gutiérrez Ordóñez 1994: 25-43), dependent on the speaker, not the code, which totally lack formal support of homonymy. That way, ambiguity is a pragmatic problem, not a semantic one, the level on which the so called semantic "ambiguity" is often identified with homonymy at different linguistic research levels. This

⁴ With regard to the analysis of certain ambiguous expressions at the sub-sentence level or word group, see Gutiérrez Ordóñez (1978:133-159) and, more recently, Díaz Hormigo (1997), who offers an explanation, from the point of view of the syntactic-semantic schemes theory, for noun phrases that include a deverbal noun as a nucleus and a prepositional phrase, that can be interpreted as the "subject" and the "object" of what is expressed by the noun, that is, those characteristics of the traditionally called "subjective" and "objective" genitive.

leads to the confusion of polysemy, as a constant phenomenon, speaker-independent, and pertaining to language (although this inherence must be described in the system according to a delimitation and functional identification of the meaning of such different signs) and ambiguity, which is its pragmatic consequence.

Polysemy or homonymy is, therefore, a general language phenomenon that belongs to the "formal" level, which the speaker uses to voluntarily create ambiguity in the expression. We must not then confuse, for the above-mentioned reasons, *homonymy* as a "relational" fact or rather "pseudo-relational" (the same expression related to several meanings) and *ambiguity*. The latter, as a problem regarding interpretation, is the result of the former in a concrete communication act. R. Trujillo had already observed that ambiguity does not affect the system itself but linguistic performance, throughout different chapters in *Elementos de semántica lingüística* (1976: 175,n.1, 215,n.1 & 248). The author believes that ambiguity belongs to the field of *parole*, often created intentionally by the speaker. This necessary distinction has also been proposed, among others, by S. Gutiérrez Ordóñez (1989:137-138 & 1992:106-107), for whom "la *homonimia* es una relación lingüística, mientras que la *ambigüedad* es un problema de interpretación". From this point of view, he offers a solution to the "tratamiento teórico de las secuencias homonímicas, con independencia de que puedan seguir planteando problemas de interpretación" (1992: 106). Although we basically accept his approach, we disagree with his consideration of polysemy or homonymy as a relationship, which is semantically non-existent. We will show that polysemy or homonymy is in fact a "pseudo-problema que proviene de tomar, en el fondo, el punto de vista del significante aislado" (R. Trujillo 1976: 237), or a *pseudo-relation*, as Á. Manteca Alonso-Cortés (1987: 177) has characterized it. For this author neither polysemy nor homonymy constitute "sense"⁵ relationships, since the speaker ignores etymology (homonymy's diachronic feature) and, from a synchronic point of view, in the case of polysemy each meaning constitutes a particular sign of the speaker's lexis. In this perspective, he distinguishes, from a generative

⁵ Another of the many authors that use *sense* (sentido) instead of *meaning* (significado), as in the title itself of this section in his book: "Relaciones de sentido entre palabras" (1987: 175). Despite the indiscriminate use of both terms in the semantic tradition, they must be differentiated as two distinct types of semantic content, since they correspond to different levels of signification (see Casas Gómez 1995b:101-112, especially 103-104, n.6. and Gutiérrez Ordóñez 1997:83-84).

approach⁶, between *ambiguity* and *polysemy*:

"La ambigüedad que origina *gato* o *aterrar* sólo se da en el oyente. Se trata de una ambigüedad en la actuación lingüística. Cuando un hablante profiere *me senté en el banco* sabe lo que quiere decir, pero el oyente puede fracasar en la comprensión si el contexto de actuación no es explícito. Por otra parte, *las palabras polisémicas no lo son en el sistema*. La subcategorización y selección semántica de un verbo como *atracar* requieren /banco/= institución; el verbo *pesar* selecciona /banco/= asiento" (Manteca Alonso Cortés 1987: 177; italics added).

We must also take into account that semantic relationships constitute acts of signification between meanings of signs, not between signs -from the point of view of *signifiants*- and the contents associated with them. The different types of connections will therefore permit the functional establishment of oppositions between the meanings of signs that belong to a fixed paradigmatic system of language. These connections are analyzed regardless of the expression level. The latter would only be useful as a correlate to mark signs that are different.

Therefore, if we only think of lexical relationships as the connections established by the meanings of signs within the system of language, we must conclude that neither polysemy nor homonymy are semantic relationships, since they would only be so from the perspective of the *signifiant*, and could be studied independently from the level of *signifié*. With these theoretical premises, lexical relationships are reduced then to those paradigmatic phenomena that can only be described from the point of view of meaning, such as synonymy, hyperonymy-hyponymy and the different sub-types of antonymic relationships.

However, we would point out that such general polysemic or homonymic phenomena must be distinguished from others wrongly called the same, which really correspond to cases of lexical syncretism. Even

⁶ Some authors, from different methodological perspectives, have established a correlation between homonymy and ambiguity, in the sense that homonymy is to structural semantics just as ambiguity is to semantics in the different generative models (Serrano 1975:107). A critical view of the theoretical importance of the concept of ambiguity in the generative grammar can be seen, in any case, in Gutiérrez Ordóñez (1989: 141-142 and, specially, 1981: 235-238). Compare this also with the review of polysemy from the perspective of the interpretative and generative semantics, done in her doctoral thesis by M^a D. Muñoz Núñez (1996a: 275-290).

though these are formally due to a homonymic process, they have meaningful oppositions between their paradigmatic meanings, which would not be in any way homonymic, but rather cases of semantic inclusion or "oppositeness". Once we are situated on the semantic level as a subject of analysis, it must be taken into account that in the majority of cases the meanings of "homonymic" or "polysemic" terms belong to lexical paradigms so distant from each other that their content forms do not bear any kind of opposing relationship or syntagmatic contrast. However, there can be, among those meanings, a relationship of inclusion such as that which exists, for example, between *pueblo*, "conjunto de personas de un lugar, región o país" and *pueblo*, "gente común y humilde de una población", *cerrar*, "encajar" and *cerrar*, "asegurar con cerradura"⁷ (compare with English *to close / to lock* or with German *schliessen / zuschliessen*), etc., or some kind of antonymic relationship such as the semantic converseness we can find in cases like *huésped*, "el que hospeda" and *huésped*, "el que es hospedado"; *renta*, "beneficio que produce una cosa o lo que de ella se cobra" and *renta*, "lo que se paga por el arrendamiento de algo"; *alquilar*, "dar en alquiler" and *alquilar*, "tomar en alquiler"; *arrendar*, "dar en arriendo" and *arrendar*, "tomar en arriendo"⁸ (compare with English *to rent / to let* or German *mieten / vermieten, pachten / verpachten*), etc. Although in these cases the existence of a polysemic or homonymic "relationship" is obvious from a formal perspective, this is identified, from a semantic point of view, with hyperonymy-hyponymy (opposition established between a hyperonym and its respective hyponyms) in the first case and with a specific kind of antonymy in the second case, in which the sole difference is the coincidence in the material expression of the signs considered.

These formal cases of homonymy, which semantically correspond to hyponymy or antonymy, are clear examples of lexical syncretism, a phenomenon in which there is a formal coincidence of the expressions indistinctly used to represent different semantic functions that belong to the

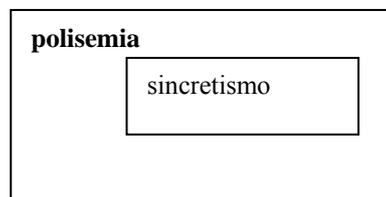
⁷ The semantic analysis of these two cases in Spanish can be seen in Salvador (1984:75 y 1985:49-50 y 96).

⁸ cf. Casas Gómez (1990: 97-105 and 1998a: 299-308) for an analysis of the linguistic aspects clearly seen in the lexical pair *alquilar-arrendar*, as well as certain notes of a contrastive nature regarding the distribution "law", which is not diachronically complied with in the semantic evolution of these verbs.

same paradigm or to a certain section of that paradigm (Casas Gómez 1997d: 37-50). That is where the differences lie between polysemy or homonymy as a universal contingency of language and those other strictly paradigmatic "polysemies", that is, syncretism in polysemy from the expression perspective, whose content forms establish other types of structural relationships by means of opposition. Consequently, we must not hesitate to establish this possibility of differentiation between polysemy or homonymy and syncretism, in that this is just a partial aspect within the polysemic or homonymic phenomenon. As this is a paradigmatic process *per se*, -contrary to neutralization- and pertaining to the structure of the language system, we must reserve this process for those forms -materially homonymic or polysemic- that restrict their semantic behaviour to exclusively paradigmatic limits. With regard to the given examples, the verb *cerrar* is a case of syncretism in polysemy that semantically expresses two close but contradictory signs ("encajar" "to close without locking" / "asegurar con cerradura" "to lock") whose meanings -which can give rise to the possibility of textual ambiguous occurrences- present an immediate paradigmatic opposition. With regard to its semantic behaviour this verbal lexeme performs in a similar way to the lexical pair *alquilar-arrendar*. They only differ in the type of functional opposition that the meanings of those signs establish (of an inclusive character between *cerrar*₁ / *cerrar*₂ and of antonymic converseness between *alquilar*₁ / *alquilar*₂ and *arrendar*₁ / *arrendar*₂), which coincide in their lexical expression. From the point of view of their formal coincidence they actually constitute clear examples of lexical *syncretism* in Spanish, different from what happens in languages like German (*schliessen / zuschliessen; mieten / vermieten; pachten / verpachten*) or English (*close / lock; rent / let*), which, in this way, resolve the ambiguities created by these lexical gaps that naturally do not imply the absence of a content form. This is due to the fact that the gaps exist from the perspective of *signifiants* (as material forms) and of "reality facts" (in the sense that there are "realities" of some languages that do not exist in others), but not from the point of view of meanings, where there are none of those empty spaces or semantic gaps⁹. Therefore, we must establish clearly the distinction between

⁹ In the conclusions shown in a historiographical paper of ours on semantic pre-structuralism (Casas Gómez 1998b:159-184, especially 175-176), we highlighted the fact that the main objections against the Neohumboldtian School, such as the problems regarding juxtaposition / superposition of structures or lexical gaps, depended not only on the semantic conception used as a starting point, but also on the symmetric/asymmetric character of sign, as well as on the

polysemy -which is a general property of language rather than a structural relationship (Trujillo 1976: 236-249, especially 242)- and syncretism, a phenomenon pertaining to the structure of the linguistic system and which we can describe as exclusively paradigmatic polysemy. Between both (*polysemy* and *syncretism*), as logic classifiers, there is a terminological inclusion, a relationship characteristic of metalanguage (M. Casas Gómez 1994: 91-95, 100-104 y 1994-95: 45-65):



With regard to the usual non-distinction between syncretism and neutralization, some have tried to establish certain theoretical differences to solve the existing confusion between the two phenomena (M. Casas Gómez 1997d: 37-50). For our purpose, we will only mention, among others, the difference based on the relationship between linguistic levels. In such a way, in the cases of syncretism, there are interferences between the expression and the content levels, considering that the same material form covers several different semantic functions. On the other hand, those interferences, as a principle, cannot be found in neutralizations -as a virtual possibility of the language system, consisting in the suppression of oppositions that must be naturally homogeneous. These discourse occurrences must belong to the same linguistic level: or to the level of expression (phonological oppositions

concept of polysemy defended in each case. According to modern functionalist approaches, such as those expressed here, the different meanings of a *signifiant*, as phonematic expressions which occupy distinct positions in several fields, would constitute different signs, so that in reality this means going back to the initial idea of the juxtaposition of semantic paradigms and of the non-existence of lexical gaps from the perspective of *signifié*, although they do exist from the perspective of the material form, as the presence of a gap regarding formal *signifiant* does not imply the non-existence of a semantic content. Such beliefs can be reached, though, on the one hand, by denying the existence of polysemy as a language system phenomenon and as a genuine semantic relation, based on the consideration of the isolated *signifiant*, and, on the other hand, by means of the restoration of symmetry or inherent relation of the sign, at least from the *signifiant* point of view. In any case, it is a totally different point of view from the one followed by the mentioned German school.

and neutralizations), or to that of content (semantic oppositions and neutralizations).

This differentiating fact simply corroborates our approach. All those so called lexical relationships which mean the interference between both levels and which have been generally analysed starting from expression to reach content (which is the case of polysemy and homonymy), do not constitute, from this point of view, semantic relationships. This is due to the fact that they do not establish any kind of opposition between their meanings independently of the expression level, and, if they do so, they are identified with hyponymy and antonymy, which constitute true paradigmatic relationships.

This means that lexical relationships must be established on one level, that of content, not of expression. Only in this way, we will be able to consider as relationships of this type those that are connected with the phenomenon of neutralization and not with syncretism, simply because, if there is any meaningful link between two or more signs, we can then establish a given functional opposition between their meanings, which can be neutralized as well. The only paradigmatic relationships that imply a neutralizable opposition¹⁰ are synonymy, hyperonymy-hyponymy and antonymy (including the differences that the latter acquires in its modalities of graded, complementary or converse terms), but never polysemy and homonymy, which, connected with syncretism, are just formal manifestations from the perspective of expression.

From this we can conclude that, with regard to polysemy or homonymy, from a purely semantic point of view, we are only interested in the distinction between general cases of polysemy or homonymy and syncretisms in the expression (in order to establish what kind of paradigmatic relationship is held by the content forms of those syncretic signs). Above all, we are interested in the formulation of linguistic behaviour rules to delimitate how many independent meanings we can find (constitutive of different linguistic signs) and how many depend on one sign; that is, in being able to determine the functional limit between meaning and sense, the paradigmatic diversity and the dispersion of signification, so that the different meanings of

¹⁰ Many scholars have analyzed synonymy, hyperonymy-hyponymy and antonymy with regard to neutralization, as we have described in different works (see Casas Gómez 1997c:99-106 and, especially, our monograph (1999b: 92-128) on lexical relationships).

"polysemic" and "homonymic" signs can be identified.

With such a vast functional description of polysemy or homonymy we will be able to insert the rest of the lexical relationships into the framework of our theoretical premises, especially synonymy, since the former is one of the main obstacles for solving the latter. With respect to these genuine semantic relationships we will start out with hyponymy and antonymy. Each can adopt two forms: 1) a relationship between meanings of signs which are different in the material expression and 2) a relationship between meanings of signs that coincide in the material expression (there would not be, therefore, any lexical relationships called polysemy or homonymy).

So, we must add to the characterization of hyponymy as a meaningful relationship between lexical elements (co-hyponyms) which are paradigmatically included or semantically subordinated to another more generic lexeme (hyperonym or archilexeme that covers the whole lexical field) and which they imply unilaterally, that this inclusive relationship can be established between meanings of completely different signs from the perspective of their phonemic expression, or else between meanings of syncretic signs that are functionally different.

These same considerations would be valid regarding antonymy which, as hyponymy, would formally imply both possibilities: it would be seen as a lexical relationship between opposed meanings of signs, that are materially different or between opposed meanings of different functional signs with syncretic expression¹¹ that maintain any of the different types of semantic "oppositeness".

With only the synonymic relationship left to discuss, this must also be analyzed in terms of meanings of signs that have different material expression -if not, there would not be a plurality of signs-, and not in terms of all the meanings to which two phonemic expressions can be associated.

With regard to synonymy, even though it is "una de las cuestiones

¹¹ This formal possibility implied by antonymy *from the point of view of meaning* coincides with the traditional approach to the subject suggested by several authors (from K.Nyrop to Ch.Bally, S.Ullmann, O.Ducháček and, specially, L.Guilbert), who, *from the point of view of signifiant*, conceive antonymy as the opposition established inside the polysemy of a word, that is, as a typical case of homonymic relation referred to those words which include within themselves two opposite meanings which stand out over a common idea. A critical review of this conception of lexical antonymy can be seen in López Hurtado (1994:302-304, nn.2,3,4 and 5).

idiomáticas más debatidas de la historia de la lingüística" (Trujillo 1996: 194; see García Hernández 1997: 6-27) and there was a special interest in the subject during the sixties, it is true that, as a theoretical problem, the interest in it declined during the following decade. On the other hand, as Á.López García states correctly, "no es una casualidad que en los últimos años haya vuelto a recabar la atención de los lingüistas"(1985: 9). This revival of research in the field of lexical relationships and especially of synonymy¹² is due to the following reasons, among others:

1) the consideration of connotations or stylistic features linked to the lexical signs as irrelevant from the point of view of the language system;

2) the possible implications that this phenomenon acquires within the different levels of signification (Casas Gómez 1995b:104-110) and especially their pragmatic projection in the field of textual linguistics;

3) the general problems regarding linguistic variation and particularly the discussions that have to do with the different opinions about the theoretical delimitation as well as the level of linguistic analysis needed for the different aspects that cover the notions of didiatopy, diastraty and diaphasy. In this sense, the concept of idiolect has been considered more preeminent than the concept of *functional language*, which some have set apart because of its uselessness while others have renewed it partially. The latter represents, in the framework of diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic variation, a delimitation of systemic, normative and pragmatic differences¹³;

4) the subsequent theoretical development of a conception of the sign as a structural unit, which implies an extension of the *signifiant* and its differentiation from the *expression* of phonic data, as well as the application of this methodological perspective to the polysemic and synonymic

¹² In this sense, a substantial number of studies (book chapters, articles in specialized journals) on synonymy have appeared in the last years. One more proof of the current importance of research on synonymy is the recent publication of a monographic issue of *Langages* about the topic, compiled by A.Balibar-Mrabti (1997), just as that M.F. Mortureux (1990) did a few years before in this same journal with hyponymy and hyperonymy.

¹³ We have talked about the theoretical status of the different types of variation and its different linguistic nature in other works (1993a: 99-123 and 1997b: 173-189), as well as about the consideration of the synonymic phenomenon from the perspective of semantic variation, with a revised description of the criteria, regarding diasystematic factors, used by different authors in their synonymic distinctions (Casas Gómez 1997a: 217-225 and 1999b: 151-171).

relationships to solve the problem of homonymy, because in that case we encounter a sole expression and different *signifiants* that determine the meaning of each of those signs. That way, not only is a functional semantics possible but a new solution is opened up as well for synonymic events (which were generally solved by means of denying the main premise of ~~its~~ their existence), by establishing relationships among the meanings of signs - not of words, terms or expressions. This perspective had been the one adopted by those authors that introduced the polysemic factor in the synonymic process and who considered that polysemy or field of significations of words was the main reason why absolute synonyms did not exist;

5) the importance acquired by this relationship regarding analysis and description of neutralization events (see n. 10) and regarding the possible re-elaboration of marks and types of semantic oppositions;

6) the strict conception of synonymy as an *identity* between meanings of signs and not in the lax sense of semantic *similitude*, as this phenomenon has been considered generally, even nowadays, which led us to a complete lack of precision in this linguistic term and to its confusion with other semantic relationships. However, this way we can come to the theoretical and practical differentiation of synonymy from those other relationships with which it has been historically confused, such as para-synonymy and mostly hyperonymy-hyponymy, and

7) the publishing of a few papers (see, for instance, G.Salvador 1985: 51-66 and S.Gutiérrez Ordóñez 1989: 117-123) that openly proclaim, not only the virtual possibility of the linguistic system of theoretically accepting synonymy as a free variation, but the existence itself of cases of absolute synonyms in the language system as well as in the sphere of linguistic variation.

As far as variation and systematics are concerned, we should take into account the concept of function to be used, since language is -first of all- a functional fact, based on the communicative function of its units. However, in the orthodox functional structuralism, the communicative criterion is not the one that has been used to determine what is relevant and what is not, since, from its analysis perspective, *function* was equalled to the linguistic content that could be determined by means of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic behaviour of units pertaining to a particular language, so that only those marks always constant in their possible contexts of appearance were relevant. Nevertheless, the function of *langue*, and particularly of the

linguistic units that conform it, implies a broader concept of function, due to the fact that the function of those units is justified by means of the communicative function of *langue*, in which those units are inserted¹⁴. This concept of communication function, closely related to the concept of linguistic relevance, which implies frequency and generalized linguistic competence criteria (see n. 16), has been applied to lexical polysemy by Muñoz Núñez (1996a: chps.7-8) in her doctoral thesis, in which she describes how frequency is not only another valid criterion to delimitate meanings of polysemic words, that is, the differentiation between semantic variants and invariants, but is also, in many cases, mainly acceptations adscribed to diastratic and/or diaphasic spheres, the only possible criterion for the functional identification as the previous phase of structuring the meanings of such units¹⁵. Moreover, the incorporation to the structural perspective of the functional principle based on this communication function will have relevant consequences both in polysemy and synonymy from the point of view of variation. This is due to the fact that, depending on the frequency of use of these polysemic or synonymic variants -which will help us to determine the knowledge or generalized linguistic competence¹⁶ of the speakers in a community (E. Coseriu 1992)- a gradation can be created, a

¹⁴ This line of analysis represents the framework for the postulates of the functional semantics or axiology, that started out with the works of A.Martinet (see, mainly, 1962; 1975:539-542, and 1976) and continued by other authors like, for instance, M.Mahmoudian (1980:5-36; 1982, and 1985:251-274), C.Germain (1981), H.G.Schogt (1989:51-59) and S.Gutiérrez Ordóñez (1989 and 1992:101-107), although this proposal had already been pointed out in the first thesis of the Linguistic Circle of Prague (1970: 15; see B.Trnka, V.Vachek, N.S.Trubetzkoy, V.Mathesius & R.Jakobson 1980:8 & 30-31) on the idea of language as a functional system of means of expression targeted to achieve a concrete goal: communication. This task and main goal of *langue* had been put forth, among the Prague linguists, especially by V.Mathesius (see B.Trnka 1983: 249-250).

¹⁵ More recently, see her theoretical approach to the concepts *communication function* and *linguistic relevance* as well as its application to polysemic and synonymic relationships (M^aD. Muñoz Núñez 1997: 1-24).

¹⁶ However, we must not identify the concept of *frequency* with that of *generality of use*, because they do not coincide. It is necessary to distinguish them, according to M^a D. Muñoz Núñez (1997: 8), "puesto que hay acepciones consignadas lexicográficamente como diastráticas y/o diafásicas que son más frecuentes fuera de sus propios ámbitos, y a pesar de sus etiquetas, que otras de carácter generalizado, y, por otra parte, acepciones no adscritas a los ámbitos diastrático y/o diafásico pueden ser de uso menos frecuente, aunque generalizado, que otras que presentan alguna de estas acotaciones".

progressive drift from the diasystem to the system, any kind of variants, for instance, of a diastratic or diaphasic character, can become a part of the language system. This way, "si la función de comunicación se ejerce como tal para la generalidad de los hablantes de una comunidad, las diferencias diastráticas y diafásicas dejan de ser tales, y las unidades constituidas a partir de esas diferencias se convierten en invariantes de nuestro sistema, tanto en el caso de los sinónimos, como en el de las distintas acepciones de palabras polisémicas" (Muñoz Núñez 1997:16). For example, if frequency proved so, an element like *pasta* "podría ser un signo del sistema de la lengua española, aun admitiendo que *dinero* y *pasta* no son sinónimos absolutos" (*op. cit.*: 16, n. 18). Thus, with regard to Salvador's proposal about synonymy and his remodeling of the concept of *functional language* (Casas Gómez 1997a: 218-219), this agrees with us (*op. cit.*: 223), since many of the diastratic and diaphasic differences are normative (although others are of a discourse nature), but she criticizes the fact that, for G.Salvador, elements like *estío*, *barriga*, *pipí*, *amigdalitis* or *pasta* -following the above-mentioned example- are just invariants of the lexical system of Spanish, so this linguist situates such elements inside the system while, on the other hand, putting their diastratic and diaphasic representative marks out of it (in the norm). In fact, in his *Principios de semántica textual*, R.Trujillo (1996: 198,n.8) has criticized the fact that G.Salvador considers, regarding certain classical examples of synonymic differentiation, such features as normative and external to the language system and not as linguistically encoded properties that allow the establishment of strict semantic differences:

"no puede entenderse muy bien por qué la oposición *horrendo* / *horrible* pertenece a la lengua, mientras que *barriga* / *vientre* sólo pertenece a la norma y no constituye, por tanto, ni siquiera una verdadera oposición semántica (...). Lo curioso de los estructuralistas es que, después de afirmar que sólo se interesan por las diferencias lingüísticas estrictas, éstas resultan no ser más que diferencias concretas, entre los objetos, o abstractas, entre las clases de objetos. Cualquier otro tipo de propiedades se consideran, sin que se sepa por qué, extralingüísticas. Así, por ejemplo, las diferencias entre *perro* y *can* son sólo <<estilísticas>>¹⁷ porque ambas palabras se

¹⁷ With this approach we can verify the change in the semantic perspective used by the Spanish author in this example. For him, such elements, "*en cierta medida* sinónimos", were

refieren a una cosa que, como tal, es igual a sí misma, sin que pueda hablarse de diferencias. ¿Por qué ahora no son lingüísticas las diferencias si sólo la lengua y *no las cosas* las delata? ¿Por qué los otros rasgos, que también están codificados, son externos a la lengua? ¿No implica esto una cierta confusión entre lengua y realidad; entre significado y denotación?"

It is evident that not all of the diasystemic differences are situated in the norm, but that some are a simple statement of the communicative expressiveness and of speakers' variation in a concrete pragmatic situation. On the other hand, the distinction between what is diastratic and diaphasic is not a sharp one (there are borders and gradations between both categories). There are more distinctions and criteria than those proposed by E. Coseriu, whose approach shows some restrictions, such as 1) the non-systematization, within social stratification, of slang and its problematic differentiation from popular language, as well as its possible and useful distinction from jargon as a diaphasic modality (Casas Gómez 1993a:101 & 111-112, n.10; 1997b:176-177, n.11, & 1997e:4, n.7); 2) the absence, closely related to (1), of

stylistic free variants ("en el fondo *invariantes expresivas*"), since "es el matiz expresivo del enunciado lo que nos lleva a <<sustituir>> dos variantes como *perro* o *can*" (R. Trujillo 1976: 187), although lately (1996: 135-136) he has defended that such units are different signs that represent an idiomatic difference: "emplear tanto *perro* como *can* no significa que se trate del mismo contenido o de dos variantes de expresión suyas: significa que *toda diferencia semántica que pueda ser pertinente o distintiva no es, en sí misma, más que una disponibilidad del código* (...). El hecho de que, por ejemplo, yo pueda usar, en un texto dado, la palabra *can*, aprovechando su diferencia lingüística con *perro*, para denotar cualquier actitud mental mía (burlarme de la cursilería de algún crítico, contraponer dos puntos de vista -<<desde el can más refinado, hasta el más humilde perro callejero>>-), o, simplemente, evitar una incómoda repetición fonética) *significa que esa diferencia pertenece a la lengua como propiedad suya inherente*, esto es, que se trata de una diferencia codificada, ya que de no ser así, todo intento de utilización del contraste entre las dos palabras resultaría imposible. El único argumento que les quedaría a los que hablan de connotación y de denotación, como propiedades exclusivas y específicas de la lengua y del texto, respectivamente, sería el de alegar que se trata de codificaciones de nivel diferente: una codificación del sistema (en la que no habría más que */perro/*, pongamos por caso), otra codificación de la norma (en la que corresponderían a */perro/* dos variantes de expresión [*perro*] y [*can*], e, incluso, un tercer nivel de codificación, para cada texto concreto ('ironía', en la parodia de un pedante; 'marca de rango', en el texto que opone el animal de raza al callejero; 'disimilación', en el texto que evita la repetición de una misma palabra, etc., etc.)). Other solutions suggested by several authors can be found in M^a D. Muñoz Núñez (1997: 4-5, n.7).

distinctions pertaining to the different types of special languages, which would have required the adoption of some other distinguishing criterion, as Rodríguez Díez adequately suggests (1981: 43). He explicitly denies that a *sectorial language* could be included within the differences proposed by the Romanian linguist, which means "una prueba clara de la limitación práctica del planteamiento de Coseriu", and 3) in the sphere of linguistic variation, we find -as in the synonymic variation events, for instance- multiple interferences depending on the *functional languages* we may compare, as happens to certain lexical pairs, such as *perro/can*, which have all kinds of variational adscriptions depending on the point of view that we may adopt (in the first element, underlie diachronic and diaphasic marks, as well as diastratic and specially diatopic interferences, since, according to the synonymic selection and exclusion criteria, it acquires lexical property in the Aragonese vocabulary). In the sphere of linguistic variation and within one *functional language* we may also come across a mixture of diastraty/diaphasy or of diaphasy/diastraty in certain lexical elements. There are, therefore, intermediate cases that drift from diastraty to diaphasy (*diastratic-diaphasic* variables), as occurs when the limits between language level (for example, popular language) and language style (for instance, familiar or vulgar language) are not clear, and one same term includes a social as well as a stylistic dimension, since there is not a strict diastratic use in the linguistic norm or diaphasic aspects with a diastratic correlate (*diaphasic-diastratic* variables), such as professional terminologies, specific vocabularies or special languages. These, even though linguistically characterized by their diaphasic expression, are, on the contrary, diastratically established according to their social groups. Such diastratic-diaphasic or diaphasic-diastratic correspondences clearly show that diastraty and diaphasy are, in no way, excluding phenomena and that, sometimes, they mean abstract degrees of variationist "markedness", not easily established in praxis, where, occasionally, they cannot be separated as they would not correspond with linguistic reality. Consequently, there is no doubt that the so called *functional language* leads us to a multiple concept of language system, totally apart from the reality of linguistic facts, and, at the same time, not very useful from the point of view of its functionality (this is exactly the language that does not "function" at all because of its structural restriction, its paradigmatic narrowness, low productivity and separation from its communicative objective). From this point of view, the functionality of signs and their paradigmatic and syntagmatic behaviour "deriva del hecho fundamental de su comunicabilidad. Defendemos, pues, que la función comunicativa no niega

estas dos perspectivas, sino que conduce a ellas, y, en casos límites, es decir, en casos en que es difícil determinar la paradigmática y sintagmática de un signo, es la función comunicativa la única decisiva" (Muñoz Núñez 1997:20).

So, in the field of synonymic variation, we must, first of all, determine which elements function as real diasystematic variants and, on the other hand, which variables have been added -or are being added gradually- to the system due to their communicative function, that is, which elements are no longer restricted exclusively to the sphere of a certain linguistic variation, due to their frequency and generality of use, and which are limited for the moment to a specialized sphere while keeping their diasystematic nature. Then, we must establish which diastratic, diastratic-diaphasic, diaphasic-diastratic or diaphasic features, normative or pragmatic, at first, have become idiomatic features with a communicative function in the language system, and which are limited to the norm or to the speech act, so that we will be able to determine, from variation, their linguistic relevance or not; distinguish between systematic or functional diastratic / diaphasic features and non systematic or non functional diastratic / diaphasic features, and then establish whether there are diasystematic features more relevant than others, that is, whether the 'popular' mark, for instance, *frequently*, is due to its generalization in use, more systematic than the 'vulgar' or 'educated' marks, just to mention a few of them. As a last step, we must analyze this drift from variation towards system, to check out whether there are other semantic differences between these "variants" that have become invariants and the rest of "synonyms" in its field, or else, and whether their differences with these other synonymic elements are limited only to their pertaining to a certain diastratic level or diaphasic style (for instance, whether the only semantic distinction between *dinero* and *pasta* is based on a change of diastratic register). The latter would prove that such marks would be totally idiomatic, because they define and characterize elements that are, in fact, integrated in the functional communicative system of language, so that both the mark and the lexical element would be situated inside the system, which would exclude contradictions as those exposed before and proposed by some authors. This way, the diastratic mark of popular level can function communicatively as a relevant feature that characterizes *pasta* in opposition to *dinero*, due to the frequency in use and social extension of *pasta*, although it probably would not function in the case of *parné*, so that we agree with M. Mahmoudian (1980: 20) in that "*tous les éléments de haute fréquence sont rigoureusement*

structurés; nous ne voulons pas dire que tout ce qui ressort à la structure rigoureuse est doué d'une fréquence élevée". That way, this author establishes a relationship between frequency and structural rigour, concluding that "la haute fréquence peut avoir comme conséquence une structure rigoureuse; alors que la basse fréquence peut entraîner la laxité de structure".

It is known that the discussion about synonymy as a semantic relationship basically consists in the existence or not of synonyms in the strictest sense (that is, absolute or perfect synonyms) and in the different opinions about such possibility. In this sense, although the axiom of the non existence of these lexical units is generalized in modern linguistics, some authors have pointed out its existence only at the discourse level -a line of thought in which we must place the approach of other linguists, that analyze synonymy related to neutralization facts-. Others, on the other hand, admit its existence -with no doubts, on occasions-, although they generally find that these cases do not abound and are fairly rare.

With regard to this topic, we must also state clearly, on the one hand, which level of signification we are describing in terms of synonymy, which means that the latter must be defined in relation with the signification stratum in which we are situated, either in a designative dimension, or in one dealing with meaning or with sense. On the other hand, we must also clarify whether its action is limited only to the lexical sphere or whether it is situated in other levels of semantic analysis, since the approach to this phenomenon as well as other semantic relationships within word level has nothing to do with those regarding, for instance, textual linguistics, which are always based on analysis models of a referential type¹⁸. Because of this, questions about the existence or not of perfect synonyms or about the existence or not of polysemy as a phenomenon of the language system, do not present a problem for textual semantics, because they mainly pertain to lexical semantics.

On the other hand, the confusion existing in the sphere of those lexical

¹⁸ As Bernárdez states in the section on semantic relationships between lexical units in his textual linguistics handbook(1982:119-120), "de los distintos modelos existentes para el estudio de las relaciones semánticas podría utilizarse, en principio, cualquiera dentro de la lingüística textual, siempre que el modelo sea de carácter referencial. Mientras en semántica léxica puede hacerse un estudio de carácter no referencial, o sólo secundariamente referencial, para el estudio del texto es preciso (...) tomar un punto de partida denotativo o referencial".

phenomena concerning certain designative-significative relationships among signs and particularly all that diversity of theories about synonymy is, in a sense, due to the lack of precision in the term itself¹⁹, which has been conceived in an ambiguous way practically in all the specialized terminology, as a similitude of content among signs or a meaningful identity among these only in certain contexts. This explains, in a sense, why synonymy -vaguely thought of as a mere semantic equivalence and not identity of meaning-, parasynonymy (quasi-synonymy or partial synonymy) and hyponymy are semantic relationships that have been historically confused but clearly differentiated. In fact, the conceptual distinctions that must be linguistically established in this sphere refer to any of these three semantic aspects. Because of this, regarding mere affinity or semantic similitude, it would be better to use the terms *parasynonymy* or *hyponymy*, depending on the case. These concepts must be, therefore, clearly differentiated according to the specific character implied by the type of hyponymic relationship, according to the different nature of lexical oppositions (equipollent / privative) established by both types of signs and according also to whether they may experience neutralization or not (as happens to equipollence of parasynonyms). We should then keep the term *synonymy* for those cases in which this possibility really occurs in the language system, that is, when an identity is strictly seen among the meanings of two or more signs, not only from the point of view of their paradigmatic relationships with the rest of the elements in their semantic system, but also from the point of view of their combinatorial distribution on the syntagmatic level.

We must admit as a potential fact, at least from a theoretical point of view, that absolute synonyms can be considered as *free variants*, not only in the field of terminology -in which, no matter the conceptual or methodological perspectives, there is practically unanimity regarding criteria within modern linguistics (Casas Gómez 1994:80-91)- but also at the level of meaningful elements of the common language, because, on the other hand, empirical proof that would verify and, at the same time, confirm the different

¹⁹ Its vagueness has been pinpointed by N. Vázquez Veiga (1995-96: 134) in an approach to the problem of synonymy in a certain group of discourse markers, mainly centered in those synonymic definitions that can be found in some lexicographical works: "Incluso el vocablo *sinonimia* es bastante impreciso como término lingüístico. Dependiendo del punto de partida que se adopte, dependiendo de cómo interpretemos este concepto, los resultados a los que se llegue serán diferentes".

theoretical aspects is required -not only in this one but in other semantic domains-, to assure that these free variations do exist in a given language, as some linguists have said. More concretely, the compilation of a corpus, which we are currently carrying out, is certainly needed. Its lack means one of the most reasonable critics that can be made to those authors that generally and in a conclusive way have admitted or (more frequently) denied the existence of synonyms, without having stopped to analyze the semantic data provided by the observation of the greatest number of examples possible, or else starting out from just a few contexts, since any judgment made on meanings or senses of an element implies its contextual insertion (the "putting in context"), and no speaker has all the combinatorial possibilities of a given word in mind. The semantic information found in the different lexicographical works is not enough to establish the existence of partial or total synonymy between two or more lexical elements. It is an essential requirement, though, to work on an extensive corpus made up of examples and surveys of speakers, which are very useful to check the frequency and degree of generality in use (generalized linguistic competence of the speakers in a community) of the meanings of the elements under consideration.

This practical aspect has been foreseen in our project on lexical relationships. For this reason, as a first step of the elaboration of this corpus, a great number of documental sources has been included (more than fifty literary works, up to now, from Spanish contemporary narrative, which show a synchronic state of Spanish language during the last fifty years), with the purpose of indexing the texts and the lexical entries. In any case, we intend, in a second phase, to add to this first group an extensive material from texts that will complement it by considering other differentiated language universes (such as essays, technical literature or journalism), by including oral material and surveys and by adding works that reflect the distinct linguistic modalities of Spanish, especially in the Latin-American. A differentiation of the lexical entries will be done afterwards, with the extension of the corpus in these new directions, according to their adscription or not to diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic registers.

Obviously, we cannot offer definite results from this theoretical approach to the subject of lexical relationships and must content ourselves with the establishment of new data and perspectives for the description of such phenomena. Only the semantic analysis of this data can give us the key to determine whether the diastratic or diaphasic features are normative or

stylistic or if, on the contrary, they constitute systematic differences that belong to language and which the code uses as relevant semantic properties. As we analyse the data and depending on the lexical elements considered, we will be able to observe which features, diasystematic at first, characterizers of elements proceeding from variation, are limited to a restricted or specialized sphere and which others are progressively joining the language system or have already acquired linguistic relevance due to their total communicative functionality, because the elements which they represent have become lexical elements of the system. From this point on, it is necessary to observe whether such diastratic or diaphasic marks -pertaining to these lexical elements- are the only idiomatic differences between those elements and other "synonyms" in its series, so that those diastratic or diaphasic variation features would function idiomatically as characterizing and distinctive marks of such elements and could be used to establish oppositions with their other "synonymic" elements in the system. If these "diasystematic variants" become a part of language as a functional communicative system, their characterizing features are also totally idiomatic and functional. Therefore, only research done in the above-mentioned way can offer us the adequate conclusions with regard to, for example, the real existence of absolute synonyms in a language, that is, elements which have *exactly* the same meaning and alternate freely in any distributional context, and can also offer us, once and for all, the general patterns for the appropriate research on the complexity and dynamism of all these semantic relationships, as well as new horizons for the problematic task of structuring the lexis of a particular language.

Regarding the current state of the theoretical and practical research undertaken by this project, we must emphasize the goals achieved during the last few years in the above-mentioned line, that appear mainly in a series of works already or about to be published and in the excellent results obtained by M.D. Muñoz Núñez, whose doctoral thesis -also mentioned before- basically tries to establish a proposal for the delimitation of the meanings of polysemic words and their subsequent functional identification. Besides the factors for the determination of invariants (opposed to variants that constitute contents of restricted use or variation within a system), factors which are usually taken into account in certain perspectives of functional structuralism, this proposes, as another delimitation criterion, in the line of a functional or axiological semantics, the frequency of use of the different acceptations considered. This analysis has been done in the examples obtained from the above-mentioned narrative corpus and by means of surveys of the speakers,

which is the only possible way to prove the social extension and the generalized linguistic competence of those semantic variants. Taking into account the goals intended, this has centered her work on a series of polysemic concrete substantives that present two or more acceptations of a generalized character and, at least one lexicographically considered as diastratic, diaphasic or diastratic-diaphasic. Since the analysis of these substantives, initially taken from the same novel, only supplied one or some of the acceptations given to each substantive depending on the context found in this work, others found in the *Diccionario de la lengua española* by the Real Academia Española, and in María Moliner's *Diccionario de uso del español*, and their respective contexts were then looked for in different novels of the corpus, so that, in total, 246 substantives and 1020 acceptations were analysed.

Regarding the theoretical part of this project, there is a book on lexical relationships (Casas Gómez 1999b), that gives a global description of these semantic phenomena, with particular reference to synonymy and the connections that it establishes with polysemy or homonymy, and, especially, with antonymy, parasynonymy and hyponymy. At the same time, there is a series of forthcoming dissertations and doctoral thesis on other semantic relationships or on different aspects of these, such as lexical antonymy, hyponymic relationships, semantic ellipsis in the framework of lexical relationships, analogies and differences between synonymy and antonymy, linguistic characterization of parasynonymy, theoretical delimitations in the sphere of semantic variation, lexical relationships from the perspective of textual semantics, connections of lexical relationships with certain figures of speech, etc. All these research papers will undoubtedly open up new perspectives for the future preparation of an intended functional dictionary (of substantives, at first) of Spanish. This will represent the first step towards the description of the particular semantics of a given language. This kind of practical application has not been done yet, as we know, in any *historical language*.

Already in the mid seventies, R. Trujillo (1976:116-n.9 & 255) critically declared that "la semántica está aún por hacer" and, in his conclusions, believed in the possibility of creating the real semantics of given languages, based on an exhaustive determination and finite numbering of the semantic features of units and on complementary analysis of the nature of the types of oppositions and the different semantic relationships. More than

twenty years have gone by, and the same feeling has been expressed by this author (1997: 32), in a clear and convincing way at the second edition of the *Jornadas de Lingüística*, that we have been holding in Cádiz since the creation of the "Linguistics" degree in our University. Trujillo considers that this discipline remains in the field of generalities and that its scientific object is limited to the methodological criticism of the "linguistics of content", so that a semantics of Spanish, Italian, French, or any other given language, still doesn't exist.

An International Conference has been held in the University of La Laguna, to commemorate the first century of semantic investigation, as a tribute to M.Bréal. There is a historiographical mistake, already commented on by us in a series of papers that try to supply new data and materials for a history of this discipline (Casas Gómez 1991, 1998b & 1999a) and also reported by E. Coseriu (1997) in the opening address of this Congress, which is the consideration of Bréal as the father of semantics. Independently of this, what really is disappointing in this field is that semantics, in essence, has not advanced much in its more than one hundred and fifty years of existence as a branch of scientific description (its birthday as a linguistic discipline goes back to 1839, when Ch. K. Reisig's *Semasiologie* was published posthumously). Taking into account the abundant anecdotal studies, serious and rigorous research in this field has not gone beyond theoretical postulates, beyond certain practical studies of concrete lexical areas or beyond simple introductions with several examples from different languages. In fact, some of the recent trends in semantics, whose results should represent advancement in this science, are, on the contrary, arriving at semantic considerations already surpassed, regarding fundamental aspects, based on old ideas that were already present in historical or "traditional" semantics itself. That is why semantics needs to leave behind theoretical speculations and go on to the practical analysis of semantic data, taking, in this way, a clear step towards its status as a science. This step ahead will not be completely achieved until exhaustive research is done, at least in a given language, on the semantic relationships established by its basic elements.

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