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MEANING AND SYNTAX IN SPOKEN MANDARIN

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CHAPTER 1

THE STUDY OF FORM AND MEANING

1. SPEECH¹ is the phenomenon of talking found in human communities all over the world. It may be contrasted with the notion of language, for which any serious linguistic endeavor needs to formulate a technical definition. In associating the everyday phenomenon of speech with language as a target of scientific inquiry, a decision has to be made as to their relative primacy. Depending on the outcome of this decision, investigations may proceed in one of two opposite directions.

One may start from ordinary speech and try to account for it both in terms of its physical characteristics and of the worldly use to which it is put. Viewed in this way, the linguist's notion of language is a theoretical construct developed from the analysis of accessible data. Subsequent steps of linguistic investigation involve the collection of speech data, the assessment of their quality, the evaluation of the data by native speakers and an analysis of the data by the observer. Each of these steps presents numerous problems for which various solutions may be proposed without abandoning the general direction of the procedure. I shall call such linguistic approaches DESCRIPTIVE.

The alternative approach is to start from a theory of language and to validate or modify it by determining its compatibility with facts observed in speech. Here again, language is viewed as a theoretical construct, but this time it derives from postulated principles. This line of attack focuses on problems presented by rules which are formulated as a corollary of the theory. The ultimate goal is to make the theory maximally predictive as to the properties of human language, which in turn determine the organization of elements of speech. I shall refer to approaches of this type as GENERATIVE.

While both approaches treat language as a theoretical construct, the procedural status of the two constructs is very different.

Comparisons of linguistic approaches inevitably lead back to one of the very few elements which play a part in all of them, viz. human speech. Indeed, example sentences which more or less directly represent speech appear to play an important role in linguistic treatments regardless of paradigmatic affiliation. Another factor common to academic approaches to language is the fact that, just as in science at

1. A technical term is printed in small capitals at the place in the text where that term is explained.

large, there usually remains a considerable gap between aims and results. Descriptive approaches ideally set out to produce full accounts of the speech habits of a language community. Yet culling a handful of speech data from one or two speakers of a specific language and accounting for these data in some detail may count as a substantial contribution to the field. In a generative approach, painstaking theoretical contemplations tend to show little promise of accounting for those language properties which are observable in speech. To a fair degree, therefore, the question is not whether one theoretical position deserves more support than another, but rather which type of inevitable drawbacks is more acceptable.

In my view, linguistics had better stay as close as possible to phenomena which belong to the common experiences of humankind, i.e. to those of speech. Still, I am ready to admit that there usually is a considerable element of personal taste in the choice of one's scientific approach. I can only report that my taste is for thrills like the one I experienced when coming across the word *bú* 'not to be' in Mandarin (see chapter 5). The chances of discovering *bú* would have been slim had I started out from the theoretical end instead of listening to recorded speech data.

In the following pages, I have undertaken to account for a necessarily very small set of data in order to give speech the priority it deserves.

2. The spirit of a descriptive approach to language may be characterized as the inclination to ask "What does it mean?" every time a difference in form is observed, and "How is it said?" whenever a difference in meaning is to be accounted for. It follows that example sentences must be properly glossed and translated. It also follows that there can be no question of *a priori* semantic distinctions. Neither of these two principles are widely accepted. Section 4 will treat the presentation of example sentences. The question of semantic distinctions will be raised in sections 5 to 7.

I treat form and meaning as twin phenomena, discrete yet inseparable like *yīn* 陰 and *yáng* 陽. Together they make up the Saussurian SIGN (de Saussure 1985: 97ff.). Both parts of the sign reside in the speaker's mind. The following considerations lead me to accept the psychological reality of both phenomena.

Sections of speech sound, or UTTERANCES, may differ in many respects yet be perceived as identical by the hearer. That is to say, when several Mandarin speakers differing in sex, age, education, mood or any combination of these factors utter the botanical term for trees and shrubs, *qiáomù* 'arbor', each realization may sound different. Nonetheless, the linguist will record as a single FORM the mental image corresponding to each of these realizations. Note that the mental image at issue here is not the meaning associated with the utterance, but a conception of speech sounds which the mind of the hearer abstracts from acoustic details. Conversely, utterances are a speaker's realizations of the forms he has in his mind.

When the sounds recorded from several speakers saying *qiáomù* are converted into graphic images by means of a spectrograph or computer, the acoustic differences between these utterances show up indisputably. The ear of native speakers and hearers is generally less well equipped to detect such variations between utterances precisely because linguistic capacities obliterate them. To ordinary native speakers and hearers, therefore, the same expression is used each time. PHONETIC data specify details of an utterance. The mental abstractions of linguistic form to which phonetic data correspond are PHONOLOGICAL phenomena.

Phonetic data can be presented in some detail by means of a phonetic transcription, conventionally enclosed in square brackets. The phonetic alphabet used here follows a recent version of the International Phonetic Alphabet (see IPA 1993). Some details on phonetic transcriptions are given in the list of technical conventions (see p. xii). For the expression *qiáomù* 'arbor', different realizations by Mandarin speakers may be described as [tɕɔu ɿ m̥u ʅ], [tɕau ɿ mu ʅ], and [tɕiav̥ m̥uə ʅ].

Forms may be presented in two ways. A narrow transcription distinguishes between forms and signs. Forms are transcribed as phonemes between slashes, as in /kɕaw ɿ mu ʅ/. Signs are italicized and written in traditional alphabetic spelling or in romanization, e.g. *qiáomù*. A broad transcription represents forms as if they were signs. I will use a broad transcription, and accordingly speak of "the form *qiáomù*", except where the need to distinguish forms from signs arises.

I adopt Carl Ebeling's (1978: 22-23) term CORRELATION for the relationship between a form and its meaning: the form *qiáomù* correlates with the meaning 'arbor'. The MEANING of a form is the mental image, for those in control of the language, of the entities in the world which can be appropriately referred to by means of realizations of that form. The entity referred to by a meaning, i.e. the thing meant, is a REFERENT of that meaning. Whether a given tree is an APPROPRIATE REFERENT of the meaning 'arbor' correlating with *qiáomù* is decided by native speakers. The linguist describes appropriateness of reference on the basis of the speakers' directions, thus furnishing the semantic analysis with an empirical foundation.

Meanings are transcribed between single quotation marks: 'arbor'. Depending on the level of analysis, the same meaning is described to differing degrees of accuracy. Thus in chapter 3, the meaning corresponding with English *length* is transcribed sometimes as 'length' and sometimes as 'the feature | long | seen as an entity'.

Willows, cedars and poplars may equally serve as appropriate referents of the meaning 'arbor' which correlates with the form *qiáomù*. Conversely, a willow tree may be referred to as *nèi ge dōngxì* 'that thing' or as *hǎo péngyou* 'dear friend', which goes to show that one and the same referent can be referred to by different meanings.

The distinction between meaning and referent parallels the one between form and utterance in the following way. A form such as /kjaw ㄣ mu ㄣ/ and a meaning such as 'arbor' both reside in the mind. An utterance [tʃau ㄣ mu ㄣ] of this form and a specific cedar serving as a referent of the meaning both belong to the external world. But while the correlation between form and meaning is a direct link, the relationship between utterances and referents is indirect, running by way of the correlating parts of the sign. That is to say, for the utterance [tʃau ㄣ mu ㄣ] and the cedar adorning the entrance to Hotel De Ceder in Leiden, a relationship can be established in terms of the correlation which exists between their respective projections in the mind of a speaker of Mandarin.

The PROJECTION of a referent is its image in the mind of the language user formed by means of perception. The notion of perception unleashes a vast array of philosophical problems. Bertrand Russell (1980) provides a transparent introduction to the questions involved, but few of these will concern us here. Whereas philosophy explores ways in which naive judgments and intuitions can be replaced by analytic truths, linguistics seeks to account for the speaker's ordinary judgments and intuitions regardless of logical or philosophical inconsistencies. Nonetheless, a few aspects of perception will be discussed in chapter 3. For the moment, I will assume that entities talked about are represented in the mind as the projection of one or more FEATURES, i.e. properties judged by speakers to pertain to entities. For the cedar tree in Leiden acting as the referent of *qiáomù* 'arbor', a feature |green| may be established as being projected in the meaning. I make use of Ebeling's convention of transcribing features between straight vertical lines (1978: 102). Features are REDUNDANT when they are underspecified with respect to other features. In the semantic description of *qiáomù* 'arbor', a feature |visible| will be redundant because the presence of this feature is presupposed by |green|. Meanings which are projections of redundant features may be said to be included in meanings which project the dominating features: the meaning 'visible' is included in the meaning 'green', which is itself included in the meaning 'arbor'.

The ability to conceive of projected features as meanings is a fundamental linguistic capacity. In this connection, Edward Sapir's (1985: 14) conjecture is inspiring: "while speech as a finished organization is a distinctly human achievement, its roots probably lie in the power of the higher apes to solve specific problems by abstracting general forms or schemata from the details of given situations". In the process of abstraction, the mind presumably selects a number of representative features, discarding other features as trivial. The mind also seems powerful enough to create such details of its own accord, and to fool itself into accepting them as representatives of given situations. For linguistic purposes, it is irrelevant whether the source of the feature is physiological or psychological: the description of meanings created on either basis remains securely within the domain of description.

3. In this study the use of written data has been kept to a minimum. From the linguist's viewpoint, written texts are a derived medium reflecting to a very limited extent the primary data of speech. This is not to deny the possibility that written texts constitute an effective medium of communication or that they form a worthy tradition in their own right. The point is that written texts are of interest to linguistics proper only to the extent that they reflect speech, so that it is usually of little interest to the linguist whether a language has written traditions or not. Nevertheless, in a number of cases the linguist has to devote attention to the writing system. In the study of dead languages, written texts allow exclusive access to speech data. Other examples of linguistic interest in writing include instances where written conventions become the source of spoken expressions. Hence in a description of the English expression /gæt/ 'General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade', the written abbreviation GATT enters into the linguistic picture.

For Mandarin, the relationship between speech and script involves some particularities worth mentioning. First and foremost, the social significance of the Chinese writing system is enormous. The Chinese themselves are unreservedly and justly proud of their characters, and the elegant intricacy of the script seldom fails to impress foreigners. Among the visual arts, the prestige of calligraphy in China has traditionally rivalled that of painting. Societies with literary traditions tend to hold written texts in greater esteem than the spoken word. In China, too, there is a strong tendency to regard the spoken word as a vulgar, less accurate derivative of a written norm.

Conversely, orthographic idiosyncrasies are often identified as linguistic problems by modern Chinese linguists. This tendency has been reinforced by successive campaigns to reform the writing system between 1955 and 1964 and again briefly in 1977-1978. During these two periods, Chinese linguistic media duly gave massive attention to problems of the writing system, and in the intervening years, scholarly activities in mainland China practically came to a standstill.

The Chinese script reforms changed the looks but not the workings of the writing system. They did not affect the relationship between visual data and the sounds of speech, which is much less direct in Chinese characters than in alphabetic scripts. This is not to say that alphabetic writing mirrors the speech chain at all adequately. For an impression of the distance which a writing system creates between visual information and the corresponding sounds, consider the circumstance that in written English, prosodic details are rendered by scanty means, such as exclamation marks, question marks and the occasional stress mark. Yet in English, as in any other language, prosodic information plays a crucial role. The part played by intonation in the success of spoken communication is far from generally recognized by speakers and often disregarded by linguists. This lack of attention may be attributed at least in part to the visual absence of prosodic details in the writing systems of the world.

Finally, it should be noted that the community of native writers and readers of Mandarin is far larger than that of native speakers. This is mainly the result of an effective promulgation of Mandarin as a standard language since the 1950s. Apart from Classical Chinese, Mandarin is virtually the only Chinese language written today. Written counterparts which do exist for other Chinese languages, e.g. Yuè (Cantonese) and Mǐn (Hokkian) dialects, have limited application and are heavily influenced by Mandarin writing traditions.

4. The question of how to present example sentences may seem a technicality better suited to classroom textbooks than to a linguistic essay. Yet for the reader of a linguistic essay, example sentences are the principal form of access to the data under discussion. Since a large amount of variation and corresponding confusion exists in this area, it seems appropriate to justify some of the principles adhered to in this study.

In most cases, my example sentences consists of three lines: (1) a line quoting linguistic forms; (2) a line of glosses; and (3) a translation. An extra line of Chinese characters is added above the first line only when an example is quoted from a written Chinese source.

The first line of an example sentence is written in the Roman alphabet. For languages normally written in this alphabet, forms are quoted according to their conventional spellings. Otherwise, a commonly accepted or scientific transcription is used. The system of transcription used for Mandarin is Hànyǔ Pīnyīn 漢語拼音. More information about this system is given in the list of technical conventions (see p. xi). Prosodic details such as pitch, duration, volume and intonational contours are not indicated in the first line, except for the informal use of commas and other common punctuation marks.

In the second line of an example sentence, a GLOSS is a semantic label or a combination of such labels corresponding to one word or morpheme in the first line. Glosses come in two kinds. Most of them represent a brief translation in lower-case type. For grammatical function words, abbreviations printed in small capitals represent longer descriptions, some of which are discussed in the text. An index of abbreviations is given in the list of technical conventions (see p. ix). The following Mandarin example contains glosses of both kinds:

- (1.1) tā mā de
3 mother SUB
'dammit'

Tā is the third person pronoun, abbreviated as '3'. Most of my spoken examples represent informal speech styles where tā is not specified for number. In formal speech styles, the meaning of tā comprises singular number and is accordingly

glossed as '3.SG'. A period links semantic labels in compound glosses which correspond to a single word in the first line of transcription. In this connection, note that in the Chinese character script, a distinction between male, female, and neuter pronouns is regularly made despite the fact that pronouns are unmarked for gender in Mandarin. In example (1.1), mā means 'mother', and the gloss 'SUB' indicates that de is a subordinative particle. The expression as a whole literally means 'that person's mother's'. As a matter of principle, a gloss supplies a meaning which is applicable to the same form in as many different contexts as possible. This may be illustrated in the following examples:

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------------|
| (1.2) Shū hǎo. | (1.3) Hǎo shū. | (1.4) Hǎo duō shū. |
| book good | good book | good many book |
| 'The book is nice.' | 'Good books.' | 'Very many books.' |

In the first two examples, the change of position of hǎo 'good' relative to shū 'book' corresponds to a semantic difference. Some syntactic details of this difference will be discussed in chapter 3. For the time being, a description in terms of Western "school grammar", however ill-suited to Mandarin syntax, may suffice here to indicate that there is a semantic difference. It might run as follows: in (1.2), hǎo is a verb corresponding closely to English *be good* and serving as a predicate to a subject shū 'book', and in (1.3) it is an adjective modifying a noun shū 'book'. The point is that these considerations do not lead to a gloss 'be.good' in (1.2) because this would detract from the maximal applicability of the gloss. In (1.2), the circumstance that 'good' is a predicate to go with 'book' is the semantic correlate of the formal circumstance that /xaw ˨˩˥/ follows /su ˨˩˥/ and that they share a single intonation unit. To be sure, there is a possibility that the same semantic information is presented by /xaw ˨˩˥/ itself, i.e. independently of its positional and prosodic context. However, a comparison with (1.3) shows that there is nothing in the form /xaw ˨˩˥/ which characterizes it as a predicate. Hence hǎo is to be glossed as 'good' in both (1.2) and (1.3).

At least two different objections are commonly raised against the above considerations. First, it may be argued that hǎo is basically a verb, and that 'good' does not exhibit this semantic aspect. According to this view, a consistent glossing of (1.2) and (1.3) would be 'be.good' in both cases. Hence (1.3) would be understood literally as 'a being-good book' or 'a book which is good'. There seems to be little evidence to support this view. In my experience, native speakers subscribing to such an analysis rely on their educational training or knowledge of foreign languages instead of on speaker intuitions. In addition, an example such as (1.4) would have to be described in terms of, roughly, 'being being good numerous books'. An analysis in terms of 'books which are being good and being numerous' is excluded here, so that the 'being good' quality will somehow have to be described as carried by 'being

numerous'. Speakers assuming a 'be.good' reading for *hǎo* in (1.2) and (1.3) are reluctant to accept it in sentences such as (1.4). I conclude that the meaning of *hǎo* should not be analyzed as 'be.good' in any of these three sentences.

Another objection which may be raised against the transcription of *hǎo* as 'good' in (1.2) is that this example is really a sentence in which a copula *shì* 'be' has been deleted. Again, it could ~~again~~ be argued that *hǎo* should be glossed as 'be.good' instead. This stance is problematic on two scores. Firstly, there is no language-internal evidence for assuming a deletion here. Such assumptions about Mandarin grammar often rest on expectations raised by grammatical properties of other languages, such as English. Secondly, a deletion constitutes a formal void. Even if such a zero form were to be assumed here, it would be this form instead of the "neighboring" form *hǎo* which correlated with the meaning 'be' in 'be.good'. In terms of presentation, when the need to assume zero forms does arise, they can either be glossed in the second line of an example underneath an empty set symbol \emptyset in the first line, or simply be explained in the main text. I prefer the second option.

The rationale behind the principle that glosses should be maximally applicable is that the line of glosses, in combination with the first line, should provide the reader with an insight into how the signs are arranged along the linear dimension which time imposes on the speech chain. In other words, the glosses ideally show how expressions are strung together in a foreign tongue, with minimal analytic interference. Glosses can be especially helpful to readers with a linguistic interest who do not happen to know the language under discussion.

In this connection, compare the glosses for Mandarin *jiù* in the following excerpt from Charles N. Li and Sandra A. Thompson (1981: 331-332):

- (1.5) A very common use of *jiù* is as a sentence-linking element meaning 'then, thereupon' [...]. In this usage, it normally has a neutral tone, as in (36):

(36) wǒ lái — le yǐhòu, tā jiù bù gāoxìng
I come — PFV after 3sg then not happy

After I came, s/he became unhappy.

Jiù can also be used in a simple sentence to mean 'immediately' or 'soon with respect to the time of utterance'. [...]

(37) a. wǒ jiù qù
I soon go

I'll soon go.

[...] When *jiù* is used as an emphatic particle, it receives special stress and optionally takes the distressed copula verb *shì* 'be' with a neutral tone:

(38) tā jiù (shì) zuò zài nàr
3sg emphatic (be) sit at there

S/He simply sat there.

Jiù may also mean 'only':

(39) tā jiù xǐhuān Zhāngsān
3sg only like Zhangsan

S/He likes only Zhangsan.

Again, the precise meaning of *jiù* in a sentence must be determined on the basis of contextual factors.

Li and Thompson's grammar is "explicitly designed for students and teachers of Mandarin" (p. xiii), and the use of different glosses for *jiù* to reflect a different "feel" of *jiù* in each case is a convenient teaching tool. Still, it is entirely possible that the meaning of *jiù* as perceived by Mandarin speakers is the same in each case. In my approach, the properties of English do not affect the representation of Mandarin semantics to the same degree. The complexity of many semantic issues requires a rigorous application of the principle that glosses be maximally applicable. An expression is glossed uniformly unless there are clear indications that homonymous meanings are involved. In the case of *jiù*, my gloss is 'just' throughout. The question of homonymy versus polysemy will be presented in section 7.

Finally, the third line of each example sentence gives an English translation. The semantic properties of English and Mandarin are so different that generally only a large set of translations would begin to do justice to the Mandarin original of the first line. In the case of (1.2), 'The book is nice.' and 'The books were nice.' represent two of many English meanings corresponding to interpretations of the same Mandarin meaning. As a matter of principle, only one translation is given in each example sentence. The distinction between meaning and interpretation will be explained in section 5.

My definition of the CONTEXT of an expression covers both neighboring linguistic expressions and relevant aspects of the non-linguistic situation in which the expression is used, e.g. the time of day, objects present in the situation of utterance, and the referents associated with preceding utterances. The reason for giving the term context a broad definition is that Mandarin, like many other languages, generally does not distinguish between the two types of context. Single quotation marks are used in the main text to transcribe meanings as well as interpretations, glosses, translations and paraphrases. A specification of the status of these transcriptions will be added whenever the need arises.

Translations given in example sentences do not serve as semantic analyses. They represent one close English equivalent of the meaning of an example sentence. The examples themselves, including their meanings, are analyzed in the main text. For example, a discussion of (1.1) may reveal the fact that some speakers explain *tā mā de* 'that person's mother's' as a euphemism deriving by ellipsis from a coarser expression *cào tā mā de bī* 'fuck his mother's cunt'. This claim may then be

contrasted by the observation that the latter expression is little used, and that in the more explicit expression, speakers prefer the pronoun *nǐ* 'you' to *tā* 'he' (cf. Lǐ Róng 1994: 165).

To the extent possible, the translations fit the stylistic peculiarities of the Mandarin sentences. In other words, the translations are as colloquial, formal, vulgar or pedantic as their originals. Whenever the context of an example was known, I have attempted to translate the example accordingly.

For someone working on Mandarin it is all very well to formulate glossing principles at will, for the isolating characteristics of this language make it readily presentable in glosses. Languages with an agglutinative character similarly allow a clear separation of morphemes, but yield a proliferation of descriptive glosses. Gerjan van Schaaijk gives the following example from Turkish:

- (1.6) Ev-de-ki-ler-in-miş.
house-Loc-Rel-Plur-Gen-Rep
'It seems to be of those who are in the house.' (1994: 35)

Languages with copious flexion lend themselves less comfortably to glossing. Compare the following examples from Russian and Mandarin:

- (1.7) On čitaet knigu.
3.MSC.SG.NOM read.NPF.PRS.3.SG book.SG.ACC
'He reads a book.'
- (1.8) Tā kàn shū.
3 look book
'He reads a book.'

Despite the need to find *ad hoc* solutions for individual languages, I maintain as before (Wiedenhof 1990: 114) that a clear division of labor between glosses and translations in example sentences can and should be implemented. Glosses give a first impression of the sequential arrangement of signs realized in the speech chain, and translations propose a situational equivalent in another language. To illustrate this division of labor, and to wind up the discussion of example sentences, let me contrast two Mandarin examples cited by others with my own presentation of the same data. The original examples are taken from Li and Thompson (1981) and from S. Robert Ramsey's (1987) compendious treatment of languages spoken in China:

- (1.9) wǒ xǐhuān tā
I like 3sg
I like him/her. (Li and Thompson 1981: 23)
- (1.10) Tā de Yīngwén, shuō de hěn hǎo.
she SP English speak SP very good
'Her English, speak's (manner) is very good.' (Ramsey 1981: 72)

In Li and Thompson's example, "3sg" means "third person singular pronoun" (p. xix); Ramsey's gloss "sp" means "subordinative particle" (p. 69). The principles outlined above would lead me to transcribe, gloss and translate as follows:

- (1.11) Wó xǐhuān tā.
1.SG like 3
'I like him.'
- (1.12) Tā de Yīngwén, shuō de hěn hǎo.
3 SUB English.language say SUB very good
'She speaks her English very well.'

In (1.9), the absence of a gender distinction being indicated in the gloss, I see no reason to repeat this information in the translation. The choice of "him" or "her" in the English sentence can be dictated by the context of the Mandarin original. In (1.10), the rendition "Her English, speak's (manner) is very good" adds little to the information provided by the glosses, and it cannot be judged an acceptable English sentence either. In my examples, any information on the "literal" arrangement of the original sentence will be relegated to the line of glosses.

5. In section 2, the duality of the linguistic sign led me to state that forms and meanings reside in the mind whereas utterances and referents belong to "the external world". But the external worlds of utterances and referents overlap only partially. Utterances are part of a CONCRETE WORLD of physical phenomena deemed material and measurable. Some referents, such as cedars, also belong to a concrete world. Other referents, such as freedom, are in an IMAGINARY WORLD created by the human mind. Many aspects of the reality of this distinction belong to philosophy. Linguistically, there is no reason to assume that there is more than one relevant way in which speakers relate meanings with appropriate referents belonging to these two worlds. A Mandarin speaker may mentally link up a cedar, coming to him in the form of sensory data from the concrete world of a busy street in Leiden, with the meaning of *qídomù* 'arbor'. In an identical way, he may associate an abstract, imaginary referent such as the notion of the freedom of speech with the meaning of *zìyóu* 'freedom', again by means of features judged to belong to the referent. In this sense, language treats referents from the concrete world and from the imaginary world in the same way, namely, in terms of representative features projected in the mind. In assuming this, I do not mean to disallow the possibility that referents belonging to these two different worlds may be associated with forms displaying systematic differences.

For the speaker to speak, the referents he wants to talk about must be cast into meanings available in his language. He pronounces the forms correlating with these

meanings as utterances. On the receiving end, the task of the hearer is first to abstract forms from these utterances and subsequently to identify the meanings with which the forms correlate. Finally, the hearer composes INTERPRETATIONS of these meanings by combining the invoked meanings with information from the context of the utterance, such as stored knowledge of the world, sensory perceptions, and the meanings invoked by preceding utterances.

Note that the entities transmitted between speaker and hearer are not meanings but utterances devoid of meaning. Utterances are prompted by meanings in the mind of the speaker, and invoke meanings in the mind of the hearer. There is no guarantee that the meanings are identical on both sides. The notion of SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE can accordingly be defined as the degree of success of a speaker in invoking by means of utterances those meanings in the mind of a hearer which for the speaker's intents and purposes are identical to the meanings in his own mind. Ultimately, individual speakers each speak their own language, the homogeneity of a language community being a matter of degree. LANGUAGE, accordingly, is the power of humans to invoke in the minds of other humans more or less truthful copies of meanings in their own minds by means of sounds emitted by the vocal apparatus, as well as the complementary phenomenon that such copies of meanings are invoked in human minds by way of these sounds as they are received by the ear. A LANGUAGE COMMUNITY is defined not by the degree to which a concrete world (e.g. a habitat) or an imaginary world (e.g. a culture) are shared, but by the degree to which its speakers link up entities in their concrete and imaginary worlds with the same meanings correlating with the same forms.

Even though the distinction between meaning and interpretation is not generally accepted as valuable or even necessary, I consider it an essential and powerful tool in descriptive semantics. Meaning is invoked in the hearer by means of an utterance. An interpretation arises from the association of this linguistic information with information from other sources, which may or may not be linguistic. The fact that utterances are always realized within a context does not render the distinction between meaning and interpretation less substantial. In other words, meaning and interpretation, like meaning and form, are discrete yet inseparable. Let me illustrate this with, once again, the cedar next to Hotel De Cedar. If *nèi ge dōngxi* 'that thing' is said while pointing at the cedar, the meaning 'that thing' will be interpreted as referring to the cedar. It does not follow, however, that *nèi ge dōngxi* means 'cedar'. In other words, there is no element of form in /nej ㄣ ge ㄣ duㄣ ㄣ hi ㄣ / correlating with the meaning 'cedar'. Given the presence in the hearer's mind of the concept of a cedar in connection with an utterance of *nèi ge dōngxi*, and assuming, as I will, that this concept cannot be traced back to the linguistic means of that sentence, it must be analyzed as the contribution of external sources: in this case, of

the act of pointing at a cedar visible to the hearer. The concept of the cedar accordingly is an interpretation.

The distinction between meaning and interpretation can also be illustrated as follows. As argued above, uttering a form cannot guarantee that the meaning intended by the speaker will be identical to the meaning invoked in the hearer. The difference between them will usually be a subtle one. In contrast, there is a wide range of possible interpretations which can be composed by the hearer on the basis of the same meaning. By definition, interpretations cannot be linguistically enforced by the speaker. However, the speaker, having selected a meaning and realizing that there is a chance of being misinterpreted by a hearer, has the choice of either (a) selecting another meaning, so that the intended interpretation is explicitly specified by the meaning to be invoked in the hearer; or (b) adding contextual clues in order to decrease the chances of being misinterpreted. Thus, when speaker A, pointing at the same cedar yet again, says *nèi ge dōngxi*, speaker B, extrapolating the line of pointing all the way up to the chimney of the hotel, may assume that 'that thing' is to be interpreted as 'that chimney'. Linguistically, the communication has been entirely successful, for the meaning 'that thing' has been invoked as intended by the speaker. This meaning may be defined roughly as 'an object away from the speaker which is the most likely one to have been intended by him', where 'most likely to have been intended' describes the notion of definiteness in the meaning of *nèi* 'that'. From A's point of view, the chimney is the wrong object, but from B's point of view, the chimney is the object most likely to have been intended by A. Speaker A has a choice of either further specifying the intended interpretation in a meaning, e.g. by saying *nèi kē bǎishù* 'that cedar' or *nèi kē shù* 'that tree', or, alternatively, of standing closer to the tree while pointing at it.

6. Given the notion of meaning as a mental image which cannot be directly transmitted between minds, the linguist is likely to witness semantic variations between individual language users. Still, the common observation that language users by and large understand each other indicates that there is usually a high degree of conformity between the meanings conceptualized by speakers and hearers. For this reason, an inventory of meanings elicited from just one language user may yield a representative semantic description. A comparison with data from other language users will enable the linguist to distinguish between individual idiosyncrasies and elements relevant to the semantic description of the language as a whole.

As the semanticist seeks systematic access to mental notions, he is compelled to study them indirectly by way of their physical arguments. In the case of meaning, the closest physical arguments are those referents which belong to a concrete world. A second physical entity relevant to the study of meaning is the utterance, i.e. the realization of the form correlating with a given meaning. For the phonologist, on the

other hand, utterances constitute the primary material. These circumstances lend a certain matter-of-factness to phonology, while semantic issues are often judged to be much more inscrutable due to the fact that referents may belong to imaginary worlds. Still, as argued in section 5, language treats imaginary referents and material referents in exactly the same way. As a consequence, linguistic informants are able to talk about these referents as if they were things.

In this connection, compare once again *Hǎo shū*. 'Good books.' with *Hǎo duō shū*. 'Very many books.' in (1.3) and (1.4). For *Hǎo shū*., if speakers agree that the things which are *hǎo* 'good' are the very same things which are *shū* 'book', the linguist may record a shared referent, viz. the books in question, for the two meanings 'good' and 'book'. The idea is simply to ask "What entity is good?" and "What entity is a book?". If the answer is the same entity in both cases, the two meanings 'good' and 'book' share the same referent. Similarly for *Hǎo duō shū*. 'Very many books.', speakers are able to formulate, each in their own way, the notion that not the books, but their numerousness is *hǎo* 'good'. For the expression as a whole, there are accordingly two referents, viz. the books in a concrete world and their numerousness in an imaginary world. The books are shared as a referent by (a) the meaning 'book' correlating with *shū*; and (b) the meaning 'a good many' correlating with *hǎo duō*. The latter meaning can in turn be analyzed as two meanings, 'good' and 'numerous', correlating with *hǎo* and *duō*, respectively, and sharing the imaginary notion of numerousness as a referent.

As just illustrated, different meanings may be construed as sharing the same referent. I will make a terminological distinction between CONVERGENT meanings, which are syntactically construed so as to share a referent, and COREFERENTIAL meanings, which share a referent as a matter of interpretation. Both terms are Ebeling's.² In the following example, the meanings 'book' and 'good' are convergent.

- (1.13) Zhè shū hǎo. Wó mǎi zhè běn.
 this book good 1.SG buy this volume
 'This book is nice. I'll buy this one.'

If the speaker wants to imply that he is going to buy the very book which he says is nice, the meanings 'book' and 'this volume' are coreferential. A non-coreferential interpretation of 'book' and 'this volume' might occur in the following situation. A

2. Ebeling (p.c. 23 July 1993) proposes *convergent* to replace his earlier (1978: 29) term *parallel*. I have adopted *convergent* because the image of meanings 'coming together' in the same referent is more transparent than the 'never touching' image suggested by *parallel*. At the same time, the contrast with the opposite case of *divergent* meanings (*ibid.*) is made clear. See also Ebeling (1978: 226-231) on coreference.

speaker, talking to a friend while looking at books in a book shop, is holding a dictionary he has chosen to buy while looking at some more books. He points out to his friend a novel he likes while saying *Zhè shū hǎo*. 'This book is nice.' and adds *Wó mǎi zhè běn*. 'I'll buy this one.' while pointing at a dictionary he intends to buy.

mouse_semantics.pdf

7. The same form often seems to correlate with a number of different meanings. The meanings to be distinguished may be so vastly different that the use of the same form is felt to be accidental, as in English *date* 'day on which something happens' and *date* 'sweet fruit from a palm tree'. In other cases, various meanings of identical forms may seem to be related in one way or another, e.g. for English *date* 'specific time' and *date* 'social acquaintance met at a prearranged time, prospective partner in love'. The correlation of unrelated meanings with the same form is usually called HOMONYMY. When one form denotes related meanings, the term POLYSEMY is used. As John Lyons (1986: 552) observes, "relatedness of meaning appears to be a matter of degree", so that "the linguist might well decide that it is preferable to leave the theoretical status of the distinction between homonymy and polysemy unresolved". In this connection, note that the decision about the degree of relatedness rests with the speaker. Meanings may in some cases be homonymous for some speakers and polysemous for others. This appears to be the case for Dutch *ruit* 'rhombus, diamond' and *ruit* 'window pane'.

As regards relatedness as "a matter of degree", one factor complicating the semantic description is that polysemous meanings may be cognate in more than one way. Consider the English form *mouse* 'small furry rodent with a long tail'. Since the advent of personal computing, *mouse* is also widely used to designate a cursor-controlling interface. The use of the form *mouse* in a computing context was suggested by a number of aspects of its 'rodent' meaning:

(1.14) **mouse** [...]

A computer peripheral consisting of a small plastic box with a number of buttons and a lead, which may be moved about on a desk or tablet to control the position of the cursor on a monitor, and used to enter commands.

A metaphorical use of the animal name, arising from the appearance of the computer device, with its compact body and its trailing flex resembling a tail, as well as its effect of making the cursor 'scamper' across the screen. This is the latest in a long line of technical uses of *mouse* based on physical resemblance to the furry animal: these include a nautical term for a type of knot and a plumber's lead weight on a line.

(Oxford: 202)

In addition to the physical aspects enumerated here, the use of the expression *mouse* may have been suggested by the initially standard gray color of computers and computer peripherals. Among later technical developments, the use of infra-red light for the transmission of signals has made the 'tail' an optional feature. An infra-red

mouse is still a mouse by virtue of its mobile, cursor-positioning, small and gray qualities, but the tail feature has been lost.

If one were to define 'mouse' in terms of the common denominator between the features of these three types of mouse, this would lead to the description 'something mobile, small and gray'. Such a semantic description falls short on two accounts. Firstly, it overlooks the fact that what speakers of English think of when they hear *mouse* is more than the notion thus delimited. Some may think of something that is additionally a rodent, and others may think of a small computer interface of one kind or other. Secondly, the fact that the cursor-positioning quality is shared between the two kinds of computer mouse is not represented in a description of the meaning of *mouse* as 'something mobile, small and gray'.

Hence polysemy does not necessarily lead to a reduction of meanings to a single invariant meaning. The relationships between meanings denoted by the same form may prove to be more meaningful than a common semantic denominator. In the case of *mouse*, consider two more meanings which render the notion of a denominator common to all meanings useless. First, *mouse* may be used to refer to a shy person. In addition, on a limited scale, passport and tax exiles have been observed to style themselves "mice" (Monitor 1993: *passim*), presumably because of the secretive qualities attributed to mice. Some characteristics of each 'mouse' are summarized below.

(1.15) *mouse*

'animal'	'cabled interface'	'infra-red interface'	'shy person'	'passport/ tax exile'
small	small	small		
with long tail	with long tail			
mobile	mobile	mobile		mobile
gray	gray	gray		
shy			shy	
secretive				secretive
furry				
rodent				
	controls cursor	controls cursor	human	human

The absence of a common semantic denominator does not necessitate a description in terms of homonymy as long as the various uses of a form can be plotted along a continuum in which adjacent uses share semantic properties. In other words, the meanings 'passport/tax exile' and 'infra-red interface' correlating with *mouse* have more in common than just being mobile, even though the lines of their semantic relationship are indirect. The fact that people using these meanings know

these things is relevant. Any meaningful connection between the different uses of a single form helps to complete the linguistic description.

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