Foreword

Pages vii–x of
Contrastive Lexical Semantics
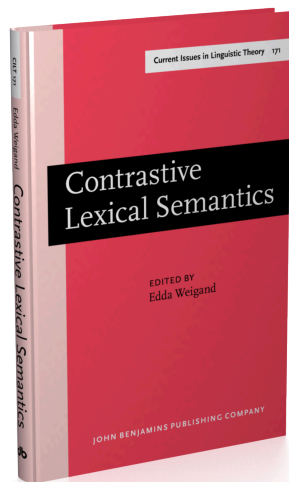**Edited by Edda Weigand**
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FOREWORD

This volume contains most of the papers given at an International Workshop on "(Contrastive) Lexical Semantics" at the University of Münster in May, 1997. A few papers on the same topic are added.

Questions of lexical semantics in general and of contrastive lexical semantics in particular were addressed from different perspectives, from the pragmatic perspective of a corpus-oriented approach as well as from the model-oriented perspective of sign theoretic linguistics. The pragmatic perspective is crucial to a project on language comparison which aims to analyse and describe the whole vocabulary-in-use in the area of emotion (see the papers by Weigand, Schmitt, Dem'jankov, Westheide, in part also Hauenherm and Gruaz). After the pragmatic turn, lexical semantics can no longer be seen as a discipline on its own but has to be developed as an integral part of a theory of language use. Essential features of individual languages can be discovered only by looking beyond the limits of our mother languages and including a contrastive perspective. Thus also lexical semantics of individual languages is considered to be in part contrastive semantics. The project is characterized not only by the features 'pragmatic' and 'contrastive' but also by the feature 'corpus-based' which has been gaining ground in recent years. Semantic conventions can no longer be justified by native competence alone; instead, they have to be verified by "hard, measurable evidence" (Sinclair, Introduction to the Cobuild Dictionary) on the basis of representative text corpora of languages-in-use.

Within a pragmatic, corpus-oriented approach essential new ideas are discussed, mainly the insight that single words can no longer be considered to be the lexical unit. It is the complex multi-word lexical unit a pragmatic approach has to deal with. The papers by Sinclair and Weigand address this multi-word lexical unit from different starting points: from the point of a formally and automatically retrievable unit and from the point of a functionally and syntactically defined unit of use.

Arguing for a complex lexical unit has its roots in the history of lexical research. Bierwisch had already noted in the sixties that there were some difficulties resulting from specific relations between the word and the context. Wunderlich, like Bierwisch participating in the workshop, also stressed the importance of the context for the analysis of lexical meaning very early on. This line of taking as lexical unit the single word and of considering it within the context reached its climax, for instance, in the work by Pustejovsky, to whom the generative approach by Wunderlich is indebted. Necessarily however it reaches its limits in so far as the rule-governed model-oriented approach, in principle, cannot tackle all the varieties and idiosyncrasies of language use and therefore remains restricted to a subset of examples. The pragmatic, corpus-oriented approach, on the contrary, makes this claim and tries to develop a new methodology for the new object of vocabulary-in-use. The categories 'model- versus corpus-oriented' express only priorities. Naturally, the model-oriented perspective also deals with empirical material and the corpus-oriented perspective tries to structure the material according to a model.

Besides the pragmatic model, other models are addressed in this volume such as the two-level model by Bierwisch, Lang, and Wunderlich in the papers by Schwarze and Steube & Späth, the structural model in the papers by Gruaz and Esser, a model of contrastive idiom analysis by Dobrovol'skij and a computerlinguistic model by Paprotté. It is however the general ground of fundamental questions regarding lexical meaning which gives rise to a fruitful and inspiring discussion. We all have to deal with the same underlying theoretical questions which refer to the rules, conventions, and principles that guide us in language use. At the workshop, such a discussion of fundamentals led to the proposal by Wunderlich to found a "Contrastive Circle".

In focusing on the vocabulary of natural languages in all its complexity, the corpus-based view seems to be quite different from the model-oriented view. While the corpus-linguists are struggling with large corpora and with difficult material which occasionally seems to defy any analysis, the theorists are confronted with models of clear logical lines which are allowed to keep to their inherent logic. At this cross-road, the scientific interest of the individual researcher determines the route to be taken. Perhaps, one day, the "Contrastive Circle" will meet again and consider old and new relationships.

Finally, there remains the pleasant duty to thank those who helped us to make the workshop and the publication of the papers possible, especially the

Münster, August 1998   Edda Weigand