

# On defining the category MONSTER – using definitional features, narrative categories and Idealized Cognitive Models (ICM's)

Piet Swanepoel

Department of Afrikaans & Theory of Literature (Unisa)

*This paper explores how the coherence between a lexical item which denotes a category and the lexical items that refer to individual members of the category can be expressed in explanatory dictionaries. A detailed analysis is provided of the relationship between the lexical item monster (which refers to a category) and the lexical items that refer to individual members of this category (e.g., Cyclops, dragon, mermaid, vampire, werewolf, Dracula, and zombie). More specifically, the goal of the paper is to determine whether the semantic explanation(s) for monster could function as a dictionary internal (as opposed to Fillmore's (2003) external) cognitive frame for the other lexical items in the monster set. If not, the question is whether and how the field of monsterology could assist one in designing such a frame and what the content, structure and function of such a frame would be.*

*In Section 2.1 the focus falls on current lexicographic practices and problems in defining the category monster and its members. The dictionary entries for monster and those of a number of its members in a selection of English explanatory dictionaries are surveyed to determine what cognitive models of the category monster underlie these definitions. In Section 2.2 the focus falls on the definitional features, ICM'S and narrative structures used to define the category of the monster in the field of monsterology and on the numerous meanings monsters may have as symbolic expressions (metaphors in particular). Section 3 shortly summarizes the contribution monsterology could make towards the definition of a monster frame.*

## 1. Introduction

Fillmore (2003) provides a convincing argument for the inclusion in electronic dictionaries of 'double-decker' definitions for sets of lexical items that reference the same frame. A double-decker definition contains two parts: one that provides a semantic explanation (definition) of the meaning of the lexical item; and a second part which provides a (clickable) link to a frame of structured background information dictionary users could need to understand not only the semantic explanation of the lexical item under consideration but also the explanations/definitions provided for the other lexical items in lexical set.<sup>1</sup>

A few examples will suffice. Most dictionary definitions for the lexical set *id*, *ego*, and *superego* only become transparent if they are interpreted within the frame of Freud's theory of primitive psychic energies and the manner of their control and modification in the maturing individual (Fillmore 2003: 272-275). Most definitions of the lexical items that name the days of the week, only make sense (for non-Western dictionary users) if they are defined against the background frame of the Western calendric concept. As Fillmore notes: 'A dictionary definition that identifies Wednesday merely as the middle day of the week is sufficient only when the full background (i.e. frame of the calendric concept-PHS)<sup>2</sup> can be taken for granted.' (Fillmore 2003: 267) Likewise, definitions of *heaven*, *hell*, *purgatory*, and *limbo* can only be understood against the folk theory of Catholic eschatology (cf. Fillmore 2003: 279-283). Such frames have to be provided 'if 'outsiders' are to end up having the same understandings as the people who live within these frames.' (Fillmore 2003: 284).

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of small lexical sets, lexical entries for each lexical item could also cross-reference the other lexical items of the set.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the discussion of the calendric frame on the Framenet website at [http://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/index.php?option=com\\_wrapper&Itemid=118&frame=Calendric\\_unit&](http://framenet.icsi.berkeley.edu/index.php?option=com_wrapper&Itemid=118&frame=Calendric_unit&).

In general, Fillmore's (2003) frames, like schemas, scripts, image schemas (cf. Fillmore 2003: 288), Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs) (cf. Lakoff 1987) and cognitive cultural models (cf. Morillas 1997) are encyclopedic knowledge structures or conceptualizations underlying the meaning of sets of lexical items that in some way appeal to such structures and which one needs to access (either in one's own brain if 'you live the frame', or some encyclopedic work if you don't) to make sense of or to understand the dictionary definitions of the lexical items in such sets. By explicating such mental models, dictionaries can thus give dictionary users (both mother-tongue speakers and non-mother-tongue speakers) insight into the semantic coherence which sets of lexical items with the same frame have – something that the traditional, printed, alphabetically organized dictionary for the most part cannot – and which is crucial for the acquisition and use of the lexical items of a language.

In this paper I want to focus on a related problem, viz. how the coherence can be expressed in explanatory dictionaries between a lexical item which denotes a category, and the lexical items that refer to individual members of the category, I have chosen for this paper the relationship between the lexical item *monster* (which refers to a category) and the lexical items that refer to individual members of this category (e.g., Cyclops, dragon, mermaid, vampire, werewolf, Dracula, zombie, etc.). More specifically, the goal of the paper is to determine whether the semantic explanation(s) for *monster* could function as a dictionary internal (as opposed to Fillmore's (2003) external) cognitive frame for the other lexical items in the monster set. If not, the question is whether and how the field of monsterology could assist one in designing such a frame and what the content, structure and function of such a frame would be. As Verner (2003: 2) argues above, such a knowledge structure enables mother tongue speakers of a language to identify a creature as a monster when they see it.

As Fillmore (2003: 284-285) notes with regard to frames in general, setting up a monster frame will require of the native speaker lexicographer to become an ethnographer and to 'exotimize' the concept in order to 'make explicit the background of beliefs, experiences, practices, institutions, or ready-made conceptualizations available to the speakers of the language as the necessary underpinnings of the ways they speak (about monsters- PHS) and the ways they 'think for speaking' (about monsters- PHS)...'(Fillmore 2003: 284).

The choice of the monster set to explore this aspect of dictionary coherence is not only motivated by my own interest in all things that go bump in the night. Humankind has been fascinated by monsters since Antiquity, and this fascination has grown unabated. This is evidenced not only by the large monster vocabulary in languages such as English, but also by the almost endless stream of popular (new and remakes of) horror movies emanating from Hollywood, and by the academic interest in monsters of all sorts: In September 2009 the seventh international conference on monsters and monstrosity was held in Oxford (cf. Nelson and Burcar 2010), and it is to be followed by the eight one in 2010. 2009 also saw the publication of Asma's *On Monsters: An Unnatural History of Our Worst Fears* (Asma 2009b) – only one of the large body of academic works that have been forthcoming in the field of monsterology (a term used by Asma 2009a).

As I will indicate below, what monsterology and lexicography have in common are the problems inherent in defining the category/concept of the monster. Being shape shifters<sup>3</sup> and floating signifiers *par excellence*, the members of this category display such variety in form,

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<sup>3</sup> Williams (1999: 121) narrows the meaning of a shape shifter down to a human being who takes on the form of a monster (e.g. the werewolf) and a spirit (both good and evil) which takes on a human or any other form (e.g. the Devil as the snake in the Garden of Eden).

function and meaning (e.g., the classic monster races, human-animal or animal-animal hybrids, deformed bodies, Frankenstein's monster, zombies, vampires, Dracula, techomonsters, cyborgs, etc.) that it is often deemed to be impossible to capture them in a neat all-encompassing definition of the category label *monster*.<sup>4</sup>

Faced with this inherent variety in the members of this category, Lisa Verner, for example, remarks in her book on monsters in the Middle Ages that 'One is tempted to declare in exasperation that a monster, like art, is indefinable, but that, also much like art, one knows it when one sees it.' (Verner 2005: 2). Asma (2009b), in his analysis of most of the Western world's monsters enlarges the category to include ghosts, racists, homophobes, xenophobes, torturers, and some of the most notorious of modern day murderers but gives no definition of a monster in his book, simply because he thinks that there does not exist one.

Williams (1999: 107) notes, furthermore, that there is an obvious contradiction in trying to tie monsters down in neat typologies, or definitions for that matter, as they exist to resist and confound any such obvious efforts at systematization.<sup>5</sup> However, numerous such attempts have been made in the field of monsterology, and, one must add, in explanatory dictionaries, 'either in ignorance of the absurdity involved, or in some cases perhaps, with delicate sensitivity to the irony that in attempting to describe the monster that is itself paradox, the paradox of taxonomy finds its justification.' (Williams 1999: 107). Despite the complexities noted by the authors cited above, neither monsterologists nor lexicographers have been deterred from providing definitions of *monster* (and, one must add, without admitting to the irony involved in coming up with the definition of a word which, according to some, defies explanation).

In Section 2.1 of this paper the focus falls on current lexicographic practices and problems in defining the category monster and its members. The dictionary entries for *monster* and those of a number of its members in a selection of English explanatory dictionaries are surveyed to determine what cognitive models of the category monster underlie these definitions. In Section 2.2 the focus falls on the definitional features, ICM'S and narrative structures used to define the category of the monster in the field of monsterology and on the numerous meanings monsters may have as symbolic expressions (metaphors in particular).

The goal is also to determine which of these could possibly be part of our understanding of the (Western) concept of the monster. As far as I could ascertain, no folk theory of the category monster exists which could simply be used for the design of a monster frame *à la* Fillmore.

Given the large body of research in the field of monsterology and the amount of explanatory dictionaries available, this overview will necessarily be selective. In Section 2.1 I will restrict the analysis of the definitions of *monster* to those in a few monolingual explanatory English

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<sup>4</sup> Weiss (2004: 124) captures some of this endless variety in his fifth theses on monsters and monstrosity:

Monsters are variously characterized by accident, indetermination, formlessness; by material incompleteness, categorical ambiguity, ontological instability. One may create monsters through hybridization, hypertrophy, or hypotrophy; through lack, excess, or multiplication; through the substitution of elements, the confusion of species, or the conflation of genders and genres.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen (1996: 6) notes that the monster is by definition a harbinger of a category crisis: 'This refusal to participate in the classificatory 'order of things' is true of monsters generally: they are disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration. And so the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threatens to smash distinctions....by refusing an easy compartmentalization of their monstrous contents, they demand a radical rethinking of boundary and normality.'

dictionaries. From the field of monsterology the definitional techniques used in Verner (2005) and Gilmore (2002) are discussed in Section 2.2. These two works were chosen as they are representative of the different approaches to defining the monster in the dictionaries under discussion. In Section 3 a number of conclusions on the use of definitional features and frame-like constructs in dictionaries are made.

## 2. What is a monster?

### 2.1. A lexicographic view

Contrary to expectation, smaller explanatory dictionaries, such as COBUILD, CIDE and NODE do not in most cases cross-reference their entries for lexical items referring to members of the monster category to the entry for *monster*. Conversely, entries for *monster* often do not contain examples of all the subcategories of monsters they distinguish and seldom provide cross-references to the relevant lexical entries referring to individual monsters. As a consequence, dictionary users are not provided with guidance as to the fact that we have to do with a set of lexical items referring to creatures which are all members of the same category. For example, there seems to be no obvious connection between NODE's definition of *monster* and some of its entries for lexical items referring to the members of the category (centaur, Cyclops, Dracula, vampire, werewolf):

- (1) **centaur**...*Greek Mythology* a member of a group of creatures with the head, arms , and torso of a man and the body and legs of a horse  
(NODE, p. 295)
- (2) **Cyclops**...*Greek Mythology* a member of a race of savage one-eyed giants  
(NODE, p. 457)
- (3) **Dracula**... the Transylvanian vampire in Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* (1897)  
(NODE, p. 557)
- (4) **vampire**...a corpse supposed, in European folklore, to leave its grave at night to drink the blood of the living by biting their necks with long pointed canine teeth  
(NODE, p. 2044)
- (5) **werewolf**...(in myth or fiction) a person who changes for periods of time into a wolf, typically when there is a full moon  
(NODE, p. 2097)
- (6) **monster**...an imaginary creature that is typically large, ugly and frightening
  - an inhumanly cruel or wicked person: *he was an unfeeling, treacherous monster*
  - a thing or animal that is excessively or dauntingly large: *this is a monster of a book, 500 pages*
  - a congenitally malformed or mutant animal or plant
 (NODE, p. 1197)

The question here is whether, and if so, how the definition of *monster* covers the definitions of the individual monsters defined in (1) - (5). Firstly, no mention is made in the definition of *monster* to any of the members of the category, that is, members are not used to exemplify what we consider to be typical monsters. Secondly, it is not at all clear how the definitions in (6) should be read. In line with the introduction to NODE (p. 19) in which a distinction is made between the core sense of a word and its subsenses, I assume that the first definition is presented as a kind of overarching definition for the monster category. That (1) - (5) in fact refer to imaginary creatures, the first defining feature in (6), the user has to infer from the labels or label like information: *Greek mythology* in (1) and (2), from the reference to the novel *Dracula* in (3), from *in European folklore* in (4) (which contains no cross-reference to the entry *Dracula*) and from *(in myth or fiction)* in (5). However, in (1) - (5) there is no reference to the fact the individual monsters are in fact *large* or indeed that they elicit fear from normal human beings. Being an imaginary creature is in itself of course, no essential

defining feature of monsters as there are numerous imaginary nonmonstrous creatures such as fairies. In short: the definition of *monster* fails to capture *at least* some of the defining features of the members of the monster category so that there seems to be little semantic connection between the category label *monster* and the individual members of the category.

The bulleted subentries of (6) are equally confusing with regard to their relationship with the overarching definition. They are presented as subsenses which do not clearly relate to the core/overarching definition. For one, in all three we do not have to do with ‘imaginary beings’; nor are they in principle ‘large’, although, in the case of the second subsense something could be depicted as large only if large is interpreted metaphorically as ‘excessive’. In the third subsense no examples are given, but the use of defining words such as *congenitally malformed* and *mutant* in fact do little to enhance the comprehensibility of the definition. The third subsense, rightly, I think, excludes deformed humans as they are not, as was the case in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, referred to today as *monsters*, but *deformed births* or *handicapped persons*. One would expect though, that the latter would be included in dictionaries based on historical principles, such as the DEL.

CIDE fares much better in as much as it gives separate entries for *monster* as this lexical item is used to refer respectively to creatures, persons, and something excessively large, as well as examples that illustrate the relevant members of the categories. It does not therefore pose a core sense with ‘related’ polysemous subsenses. However, it does not cover the sense ‘a congenitally malformed or mutant animal or plant’ – a meaning which, as will be discussed below, is often used, albeit in different formulation, to define the category of monster.

- (7) **monster** (CREATURE)...any imaginary frightening creature, esp. one which is large and strange – *a sea monster – prehistoric monster - the Loch Ness monster – The story was about a monster who wanted children to like him*
- (8) **monster** (PERSON)... a cruel and frightening person – *Only a monster could beat a child so severely*  
(CIDE, p. 916)

But again, entries for members of the category are not always cross-referenced to the entry for *monster*; for example:

- (9) **Zombie**.....-In some Caribbean religions, a zombie is a dead person who has been brought back to life by magic  
(CIDE, p. 1700)

Besides the lack of cross-referencing, it is actually unclear whether or not the compilers of CIDE think that the zombie is a monster. In (9) the first sense listed is the metaphorical use of the word *zombie* to refer to ‘a person who lacks energy, seems to act without thinking and is not aware of what is happening around them’ and gives as an example sentence: *My job is so boring it is turning me into a zombie*. It does not, therefore, in fact define the zombie monster so familiar from Hollywood movies. The second sense listed in (9) is rather vague as it is not clear whether the person who has been brought back from the dead is in fact just a (non-imaginary) person and/or a monster as well.

On the other hand, in the case of the CIDE entry for *dragon* there is a cross-reference to a picture of imaginary beings (CIDE, p. 705):

- (10)**dragon**.. a large fierce imaginary animal, usually represented with wings, a long tail and fire coming out of its mouth – *I was reading my nephew a story about a handsome prince who rescues a princess from a dragon*

**Cross-reference:** PIC- Imaginary creatures  
(CIDE, p. 418)

In the picture itself (CIDE, p. 705), there are representations of imaginary beings (and thus monsters) such as the unicorn, centaur, wizard, witch, the Loch Ness monster, a giant, a ghost, the Grim Reaper, the goblin and the mermaid, but also, however, of a fairy. Although there are also wicked fairies, all fairies are not traditionally considered to monsters (cf. my remark above). A point to which I will return later, is the typical monster narrative that is introduced by the example sentence in which the prince rescues the princess from the monster.

So far, it therefore seems that in some of the smaller explanatory dictionaries *monster* is typically used to refer to a large, imaginary creature (human or non-human) that instills fear in humans (cf. also COBUILD, p. 935: ‘ a large imaginary creature that looks extremely frightening’) and when used to refer to (non-imaginary) humans, their defining features are that they are evil or cruel and instill fear in other humans (cf. also COBUILD, p. 935: ‘...a cruel, frightening, or evil person’). In both cases however, the defining terms are relational in character. For example, how large, cruel or evil must a creature be to be labeled as a monster; given that monsters are imaginary beings, and given that we know that they are, why should we be scared of or frightened by them (a question, though, considered by philosophers and psychologists alike; cf. the discussion below). Furthermore, it is not clear from the dictionary entries themselves whether the application of *monster* to humans which are cruel and evil in fact represents a metaphorical extension of the word as being evil and cruel are also deemed to be characteristic of non-human monsters.

The electronic dictionary *Dictionary.com Unabridged*, based on the *Random House Dictionary* (2010) not only captures all the definitions of the *monster* noted above – in fact it splits some of the defining features into separate subsenses - but it also adds a few others which will prove to be of importance in the discussion below:

(11)**monster**

- 1 a legendary animal combining features of animal and human form or having the forms of various animals in combination, as a centaur, griffin, or sphinx.
- 2 any creature so ugly or monstrous as to frighten people.
- 3 any animal or human grotesquely deviating from the normal shape, behavior, or character.
- 4 a person who excites horror by wickedness, cruelty, etc.
- 5 any animal or thing huge in size.
- 6 *Biology*.
  - a an animal or plant of abnormal form or structure, as from marked malformation or the absence of certain parts or organs.
  - b a grossly anomalous fetus or infant, esp. one that is not viable.
- 7 anything unnatural or monstrous.

**Origin:**

1250–1300; ME *monstre* < L *mōnstrum* portent, unnatural event, monster, equiv. to *mon(ēre)* to warn + *-strum* n. suffix

(<http://dictionary.reference.com/cite.html?qh=monster&ia=luna>).

(11.1) captures what is seen in monsterology as one of the major defining feature of a large subcategory of monsters, viz. their morphological hybridity. If the defining feature *legendary* refers to legend as genre, one, could, I suppose also interpret it to mean ‘imaginary’, which is lifted out in most other definitions above as being a major characteristic of monsters. (11.2) and (11.5) capture the features large, and the ability of the monster to evoke fear; (11.4)

defines a monstrous person. (11.3), however, introduces the sense of the monster as a deviancy from a what is considered normal for the category of animal and human (‘any animal or human grotesquely deviating from the normal shape, behavior, or character’) – of which the meaning of the term *monster* in biology (cf. (11.6a) and (11.6b)) is derived, but which is extended to the category of plants, and within the category of humans, to the category of deformed births.

Samuel Johnson in the *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) also gives as the core sense of *monster* the deviancy of the monster from what is considered to be normal; the definition of a monster as an ‘imaginary being’ is not specified:

- (12) MONSTER. n.s. [*monstre*, Fr. *monstrum*, Latin.]  
 1. Something out of the common order of nature.  
 2. Something horrible for deformity, wickedness, or mischief.  
 To MO'NSTER. v.a. [from the noun.]  
 To put out of the common order of things. Not in use.  
 (Quoted from: <http://www.english.upenn.edu/Projects/knarf/Contexts/sjmonst.html>)

Both (11.3, 11.6a,b) and (12) therefore take as one of the primary senses of *monster* that it is something that deviates from the normal features of a category or ‘the common order of nature’. However, the definitions themselves do not make clear what constitutes the common order of nature (or what should be considered normal) and precisely what (and to what degree of) deviancy is characteristic of monsters. In other words, the necessary frame (or structured knowledge base) that acts as background to the definition – in the sense of Fillmore (2003) - and which has to be explicated to make sense of the definition, is not provided for the dictionary user.

The *monster* entry in *Webster's Third* (p.1465) is rather short, does not provide a core definition, introduces a number of other features of the category of the monster not covered by the entries above, but also contains as part of the defining language words that users might find difficult to understand (e.g. *brute*):

- (13) **monster**...[ME *monster*, fr. MR, fr. L *monstrum* evil omen, monster, monstrosity, prob. Fr. *monēre* to remind, warn...]  
 1: *obs*: something unnaturally marvelous: PRODIGY  
 2a: an animal or plant departing greatly in form or structure from the usual type of its species – compare TERATOLOGY  
 2b: one who shows a deviation from the normal in behavior or character  
 3a: a legendary animal usu. of great size and ferocity that has a form either partly brute and partly human or compounded of elements from other brute forms  
 3b: a threatening force: an engulfing power  
 4a: an animal of strange and often terrifying shape  
 4b: a living thing unusually large for its kind  
 5: something monstrous; esp. a person of unnatural or excessive ugliness, deformity, wickedness, or cruelty

Once again, the focus is on deviance (in form, size, structure, behavior, temperament character, appearance (ugliness)) from what can be considered normal for some category. The cross-reference *Teratology* refers to the scientific study of congenital abnormalities and abnormal formations – a field which bloomed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century in England and Europe and which focused on so-called ‘monstrous births’ (cf. the discussion below).

Although (13.1) is labeled as *obsolete*, one encounters it quite often in texts from the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century where *wonder* is often used as synonym for *monster*, or in combination with *monster* as in a *wonderful monster* with the sense of ‘something unnaturally marvelous’. In (11.3) there is also mention of a monster as something which ‘grotesquely’ deviates from some category, and in the Middle Ages, for example, *monster* could have shades of any or all three of these meanings.<sup>6</sup>

The etymology of *monster* is fleshed out in more detail in (13), which clearly explicates the function of the monster to act as portent, as warning, or a reminder, or as an evil omen. Clearly monsters were, and still are – see the discussion below – considered to be symbolic expressions which need to be interpreted. Besides the fact that they could be interpreted as omens of some (forthcoming?) evil (OED, p. 1036, mentions that *monster* referred to ‘a divine portent or warning’), none of the dictionaries I consulted in fact provide in their entries for *monster* an indication of what monsters are warnings or reminders of. Although some dictionaries do provide such symbolic senses in their entries for individual monsters, these are mainly – as far as I could determine- restricted to the class of so-called classical monsters or those found in Medieval bestiaries. However, the interpretation of what Modern Age monsters such as Frankenstein, Dracula, zombies, technomonsters and avatars could mean, are left to monsterologists (cf. the discussion below).

The *monster*-entry of *Webster’s Third* (cf. (13)) clearly took the OED entry as model, except that the latter also includes figurative uses of the word where applicable, and adds an additional note to one of its subsenses (cf. 14.3a):

(14) **monster**

1. Something extraordinary or unnatural; a prodigy, a marvel. *Obs.*
- 2.a A animal or plant deviating in one or more of its parts from the normal type; *spec.*, an animal afflicted with some congenital, malformation; a misshapen birth, an abortion... *When two children are distinct they are called twins; and monsters, when they are joined together...*
- b. *transf. and fig...* *The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters...*
3. a An imaginary animal (such as the centaur, sphinx, minotaur, or the heraldic griffin, wyvern etc.) having a form either partly brute and partly human, or compounded of elements from two or more animal forms.  
Except in heraldic use, the word usually suggests the additional notion of great size and ferocity, being specifically associated with the ‘monsters’ victoriously encountered by various mythical heroes.
- b. *transf. and fig...* *The fowl monster Glutteny...*
4. A person of inhuman and horrible cruelty or wickedness; a monstrous example of (wickedness, or some particular vice).
5. An animal of huge size; hence anything of vast and unwieldy proportions.  
... *A monster of the see..; 1613 A great beast...(a Crocodile or some other monster); 1832 ...The wallowing monster spouted his foam fountains in the sea...*  
(OED, p. 1036-1037)

To summarize: From the analysis of the dictionary entries for *monster* a complex notion of the category of the monster evolves. In few of the entries lexicographers try and discern a core sense for the category and list a number of related subsenses. In most entries, separate (sub)senses of the lexical item are provided, each defining a subset of the category of monsters (as is in fact also the case in (6)). Lack of cross-referencing between the entry for *monster* and those for lexical items denoting its members, does not, however, make it clear

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Swanepoel (2010) for a discussion of Adriaen Coenen’s use of the term *wonderful monster* in his marine encyclopedias from the 16<sup>th</sup> century.



that we have a set of lexical items referring to the same frame. A number of (mostly overlapping) defining features are used in describing these subsets of monsters, although none of these seem to have the status of being either necessary or sufficient in defining the category (or any of its subsets). Occasionally there is reference to the narrative frame in which monsters are encountered. There are references to the genres (Greek mythology, folklore, etc) in which they appear; example sentences suggestive of the schematic narratives in which they figure (cf. (10)) are given, as well as in a note to a subsense (cf. (14.3a)). As indicated, though, a central sense of *monster* that emerges is that of deviance of some sort from what is considered the ‘normal’ or defining features of some category. Precisely how this should be interpreted is not clear, and I return to this problem in the discussion below.

## 2.2. A view from monsterology

Monsterology is the field of study that focuses on such daunting questions as why we are both attracted to and repulsed by monsters, and what the form, function and meaning of monsters are within specific historical contexts. Finding one’s way through the literature could prove to be a confusing experience, given the myriad of philosophical, epistemological and ontological frameworks by way of which monsterologists try and answer these questions with respect to the monsters of specific historical periods (Classical monsters, monsters in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, modern and postmodern monsters, etc), specific genres, such as the horror movie (cf., for example Schneider 2004), or with regard to monsters in general.

My own experience is that in most of these studies the focus falls on any one or more of four major variables interacting on each other in multiple ways: the features of the monster as ontological being and the narrative in which it figures in a text; the historical cultural, social, political, economic and psychological context of which it becomes a symbolic expression; the contextually bound meanings assigned to the monsters in such contexts; and the theoretical paradigms that guide the analyses of the research questions, and which often state the principles of how a monster should be read (and given meaning) within a specific context:

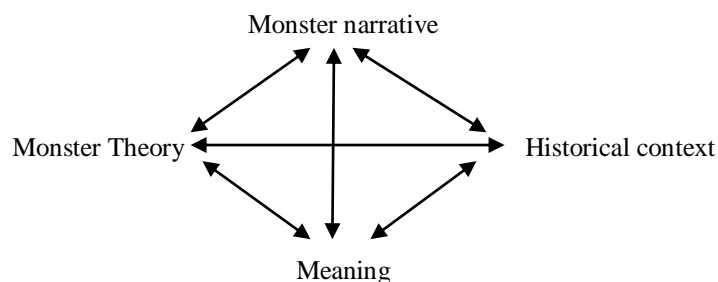


Figure 1. Monsterology: Theory and analysis

For example, authors such as Bates (2005), Campbell (1988), Cohen (1996b), Carroll (1990), Creed (1993), Douglas (1966) (theory of ritual and (im)purity), Freud (1919) (theory of the uncanny), Gilmore (2002), Hassig (1995), Kristeva (1982) (theory of the abject), Verner (2005), and Williams (1999), to name but a few, try and define the monster category in terms of their ontological features and epistemological functions and their contextually determined meanings within specific theoretical frameworks (psychoanalytical theory, feminist theory, cognitive metaphor theory, gender theory, post colonial theory, deconstructivism, etc.). In addition, they focus on the perplexing question of why we as humans are both attracted to and repulsed by monsters.

In trying to answer the question of what a monster could possibly be, monsterologists have used various strategies to come up with some kind of acceptable definition. One of these strategies seems to be to present an overarching, but very general and often vague definition of the category as a whole, and then to fill in the vague definition by indicating in more detail how these defining features have to be interpreted. Exemplary of this kind of approach is Verner (2005), who defines a monster, following the one given in the *Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (14<sup>th</sup> century), as anything ‘deformed against kind’, contrary to ‘a class of creatures: human beings, birds, reptiles, etc’ or ‘deformed against the general category of creature under consideration’ (Verner 2005: 5) - a definition that concurs with that provided in some of the dictionary entries discussed in 2.1. Verner notes though, that to succeed as a working definition, one would have to interpret what constitutes both a kind and a deviation of a kind very broadly to include not only appearance and behaviour but in fact everything that - if one may generalize - is viewed as constitutive and defining (and thus as normal) of a category within a specific cultural matrix.

Verner (2005: 5-6) refers to other deviancies of the category human, such as moral perversions, unusual maturation rates (e.g. the pigmies) and strange methods of sustenance (e.g. the apple smellers). It should be obvious however, that this definition and the few examples of deviations, concise as it may be, does not get to the heart of the defining features of the category of monsters. It does not specify in any or enough detail what a specific language community discerns as the categories/kinds that constitute their interpretation of the structure of the universe and of what would be considered as deviation from this intersubjective world view. Such a larger knowledge structure is captured in cognitive semantics by the concept of a (historically specific) Idealized Cognitive Model (ICM; cf. Lakoff 1987) or by Morillas’ (cf. Morillas 1997) intersubjective cultural cognitive model, which is an integration of concept models from cognitive semantics and cognitive anthropology. Such models are complex knowledge structures that clearly specify how a language community categorises the world (‘carves it at its joints’) into what exists and what not, what the defining features of each category are, how members of a category could be identified, what constitutes deviancies of such categories and how we should respond to them cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally.<sup>7</sup>

The ICM underlying most Western concepts of monsters, for example, is the Great Chain of Being (cf. Lakoff and Turner 1989: 166 ff., and Matthey and Stoffers 1994). The Great Chain of Being neatly organizes the world into a clearly defined set of categories. The monstrous deviates from this categorization vertically in that monsters are hybrids of two or more categories (e.g. human and animal, as some of the Plinian monster races), or horizontally in as much as they combine creatures from the same overarching category, for example hybrids of various animals, or deviate from what could be considered the prototype of each category (e.g. pigmies and giants in the category of humans).

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<sup>7</sup> According to Morillas (1997: 55) such models – often also called a ‘world view’ - are complex but schematic mental structures whose main functions are ‘to represent the world/environment; to help interpret the world/environment; to direct and orient actions; to cause systems of affect and emotion; to regulate interpersonal action; to help create new meanings.’ Thomas (1983), for example, provides a detailed analysis of aspects of the world view of Tudor and Stewart England (1500-1800).

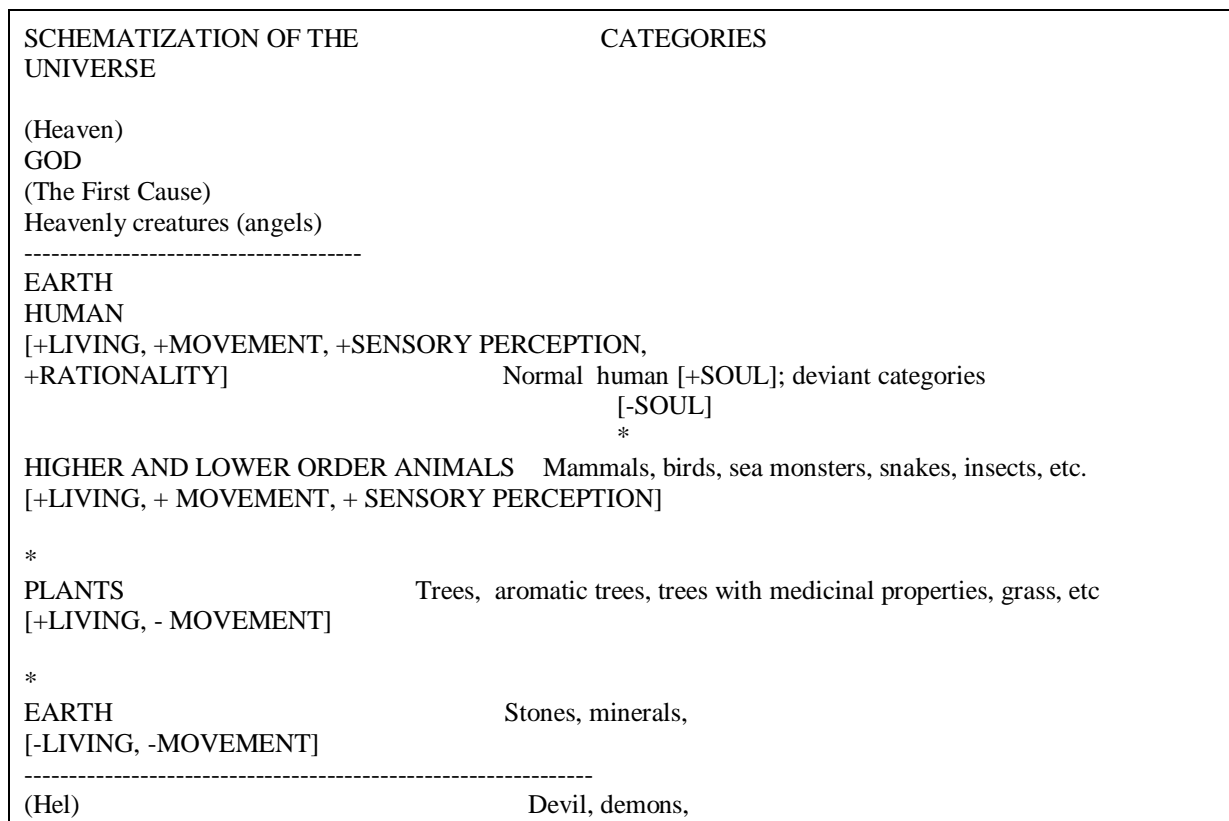


Diagram 1. The Great Chain of Being

Various authors have noted the fact that monsters represent deviancies from the natural order as defined in the Great Chain of Being, and that their very existence challenges this order. Cohen (1996; cf. fn.3) and Douglas (1966), for example, relate the feelings of horror we experience in encounters with monsters to their liminal (intercategorical state). Monsters live at the edges of our normal and accepted classifications of the world and one of their major functions is to continually challenge what we accept as normal.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, from their position within the marges, they can also function epistemologically to define those concepts/categories of which a whole world view such as the Great Chain of Being is constituted. For example, monsters present deviances from all that characterize us as humans. Campbell, as quoted by Gilmore (2002: 7), defines a monster as ‘some horrendous presence or apparition that explodes all our standards for harmony, order and ethical conduct’. Mason (1990,1991, 2009) explores this deviancy in more depth in his analysis of how the Plinian races deviate from all of the major features that characterize a cultured human being (be it a Western one) with regard to dietary habits, possession of language, building of towns and cities, arts, legislation, social interaction, religion, philosophy and labour. By their deviancy, monsters are definitions of what we consider ourselves not to be, and what we consider ourselves to be has to be deduced from their opposites (as is typical of negative definitions).

Seen against the above, Verner’s (2005) definition, how concise it may be, does not provide one with an adequate semantic explanation of what a monster is, or, for that matter what the word *monster* means. At most, her definition could prime or activate the more complex ICM language users have of all categories we distinguish in the world, what their defining features

<sup>8</sup> Weiss (2004: 125) captures this feature in his thesis 7: ‘Monsters exist in margins. They are thus avatars of chance, impurity, heterodoxy; abomination, mutation, metamorphosis; prodigy, mystery, marvel. Monsters are indicators of epistemic shifts.’

are, and how monsters are or could in multiple possible ways be deviances from these categories. As Fillmore (2003) has argued with respect to the incorporation of frames into lexical definitions, language users would find it extremely difficult to understand what the word *monster* means if it is not defined against a frame such as the Great Chain of Being. As argued in Swanepoel (2007), one of the main reasons for going online with our dictionaries would be that the electronic media/the World Wide Web make it possible to link dictionary definitions to relevant resources (e.g. encyclopedic entries) that expand on the relevant ICM's and thereby enhance their comprehensibility.

A second defining strategy used by monsterologists, is to narrow the category MONSTER down by excluding some subclass of what other monsterologists (e.g. Asma 2009b) would include in the category. This is the strategy used by Gilmore (2002: 6), who restricts the term to refer to 'supernatural, mythical, or magical products of the imagination' (which people find loathsome, terrifying, or dangerous) – a definition that clearly links on to those dictionary definitions in Section 2.1 which restrict, or at least include as subcategory, imaginary beings. What Gilmore explicitly excludes are heinous criminals or mass murders such as Hitler or Stalin (which could be deemed monstrous only in a metaphorical sense), humans or other existing creatures with physical abnormalities, freaks and birth defects, witches and sorcerers, which, like serial killers, are humans that 'have gone bad, rather than fantasies' - and revenants like ghosts and zombies because they are 'only dead (or half-dead) people come back to haunt' (Gilmore 2002: 6).

Not everyone will agree with Gilmore's (2002) exclusion of revenants as non-imaginary beings, but with his exclusion of humans or other existing creatures with physical abnormalities, freaks and birth defects he in fact ignores a large subcategory of what were considered monsters in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance and well into the mid-Twentieth Century (cf. Thomson 1997). Numerous studies exist of this (sub)category, their morphological features, epistemological functions and specifically how they were interpreted as portents of religious, moral and secular meanings (cf., for example, Bates 2005, Brammel 1996, Friedman 1981, Park and Daston 1981, Razovsky 1996, Spinks 2005, Verner 2005, and Wilson 2002). Lexicographically seen, however, such narrowing down of the category of the monster simply blacks out some of the central meanings of the lexical item *monster* – meanings which are central in historical dictionaries or explanatory dictionaries on historical principles.

So what creatures does Gilmore (2002) include within the category? For him the category includes (cf. Gilmore 2002: 6) such embodiments of terror as grotesque hybrids, human metamorphoses like werewolves and vampires, man-eating giants, shape shifters like Mr. Jekyll-Hyde, dragons, ogres and terrible cryptomorphs like Grendel in *Beowulf*, the yeti or the abominable snowmen. Besides being imaginary beings, Gilmore (2002: 6-11; 174-194) lists a number of other defining features of the category of imaginary monsters: grotesque hybridity (especially size –gigantism- and deformity), mystery and menace, inherent evil, that is, unmotivated wickedness towards humans; their ability to elicit fear and terror (including the primal fear of being eaten). Gilmore (2002: 174-194) also lists the following as universal features of the category of monsters:

- Gigantism

Monsters are often vastly, grotesquely oversized which translates to a power advantage in confrontation with humans and other animals. They loom over small, weak, and overshadowed humans, instilling fear in the subjugated. However, they are often also seen as

supernaturally powerful like the gods, and thus objects of awe, even of reverence that borders on the religious. Pigmies are the physical and conceptual opposites of giants and function as figures of deprivation (cf. Williams 1999: 111).

- **Malevant jaws**

Accompanying their physical immensity, they often have a colossal mouth as organ of predation and destruction, cavernous mouths brimming with fearsome teeth, fangs or other means of predation with which they bite, rip and tear humans and devour them. In monster representations, the focus is often on the mouth as destructive weapon with an assemblage of teeth, fangs, jaws, tongue and gulping throat.

- **Killing looks**

The focus on the mouth is often combined with a focus on the eyes of the creature as a weapon of destruction, for example, monsters often have eyes that mesmerize or even kill their human prey with their looks. According to Williams (1999: 127) the human head is the most symbolic part of the body in Western cultures. It is the seat of reason, symbol of mind and human nature itself and placed above the rest of the body, signifying the superiority of the intellectual over the physical. It is therefore not surprising that the head is often the most deformed to represent monstrous concepts.

- **Cannibalism**

Monsters are man-eaters; cannibalism is the ultimate form of sadism. The myth of the cannibalistic man-eater is also often used to monster other groups in an attempt to subjugate them.

- **Morphological deviance**

The nature and kinds of morphological deviance that monsters can exhibit are discussed above with regard to the Great Chain of Being. Williams (1999: 107) lists Isidore of Seville's taxonomy of monster morphological deviancies, a taxonomy that in many ways applied to the Medieval monster, but which conceptually organizes most of present day monsters as well. According to Isidore, monstrosity is constituted in one of the following (but sometimes overlapping) deviancies from the normal human body<sup>9</sup>:

- (1) hypertrophy of the body, (2) atrophy of the body, (3) excrescence of bodily parts, (4) superfluity of bodily parts, (5) deprivation of parts, (6) mixture of human and animal parts, (7) animal births by human women, (8) mislocation of organs or parts in the body, (9) disturbed growth (being born old), (10) composite beings, (11) hermaphrodites, (12) monstrous races.

(2)

- **Habitat**

Gilmore (2002: 12-13) notes that monsters almost universally live

...in borderline places, inhabiting an 'outside' dimension that is apart from, but parallel to and intersecting the human community. They often live in liars deep underground, in an unseen dimension as it were, or in watery places like marshes, fens, or swamps. Or else they infest distant wildernesses of

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<sup>9</sup> Williams (1999: 108) notes that Isidore perceived the human body as the most useful model for a taxonomy of the monster: 'Although physical deformations are by no means the only negations that monstrosity effects, the human body through its symbolic extensions (as a microcosm of the macrocosm-PHS) as well as its physical structure, provides the most complete paradigm for order and thus for the disorder that has precedence and priority in the monstrous configuration of reality. As the first construct we experience and as that one with which we remain most intimate – which, indeed, we love and nurture – our bodies provide not only a model, but an original and continuing symbol of order itself.'

which people are afraid, like mountain tops, oceans, glaciers, or jungles. They emerge from these fastnesses at night or during abnormal cosmological events to shake humans from their complacency, appearing in darkness or during storms, earthquakes, famines, or other times of disturbance.

The Antipodes, on the other hand, live (upside down) under the globe and function as parody of human existence (cf. Williams 1999: 119).

A few features which Gilmore (2002) does not discuss in depth and which surface often in the depiction of monsters (cf. Swanepoel 2010), are

- Sexual promiscuity

Some monsters are depicted as sexually deviant, i.e. sexually promiscuous, as for example the mermaids who deceitfully try and attract their prey with their sweet songs and entice them into having sex with them, and then tearing them to pieces if they do not participate. Sexual promiscuity is also manifest in sexual deviancy – many monsters in fact are hermaphrodites – the most ambiguous state one can be in (cf. the discussion of the narrative of the Brazilian sea monster in Swanepoel 2010).

- Lack of the true religion/devil worship

Monsters are often depicted as servants of the devil. Given their disregard for the true (Christian) religion, they are also said to partake in human sacrifices, rituals to honour the devil and sun and moon worship.

Given their symbolic function as portents (cf. the etymology of *monster*), monsters have, as Gilmore (2002: 9) notes, always been ‘part of a semiotic culture of divination, metaphors, messages, indications of deeper meaning or inspiration.’ As in psycho-analytical approaches to monsters, Gilmore (2002: 4) sees the monster narrative as a pictorial metaphor ‘for human qualities that have to be repudiated, externalized and defeated’. These qualities he systematically links to the morphological and behavioural features of the monster (and its associated narrative). They include not only aggression and guilt, but also the urge for self punishment, sexual sadism, and victimization. The monster ‘embodies the existential threat to social life, the chaos, atavism, and negativism that symbolize destructiveness and all other obstacles to order and progress, all that defeats, destroys, draws back, undermines, subverts the human subject – that is, the id.’ (Gilmore 2002: 12). According to Wood (1986: 198), however, monsters represent everything that has to be suppressed that threatens the hegemony of the monogamous, heterosexual, bourgeois, patriarchal, capitalist society, for example, sexual energy, bisexuality, homosexuality, female sexuality and the sexuality of children. Schneider (1999), on the other hand, sees monsters as metaphors for a number of surmounted beliefs such as our belief in (and fear of) the return of the dead in the form of reincarnated monsters (zombies, Dracula, Frankenstein’s monster), or as spirits or evil forces that take demonic possession of people; and the surmounted belief in the existence of doubles (dyadic monsters such as twins and clones or replicants such as robots and cyborgs). (Cf. Schneider 2004 for an overview of such psychoanalytical approaches to the meaning of monsters.). An alternative interpretation of the symbolic significance of the morphological features of monsters is provided by Williams (1999: 107- 176). Cf. also Mason (1990, 1991, 2009).

As indicated above, the repressed human qualities and thoughts surface as monsters and therefore these monsters have to be destroyed. As Gilmore (2002: 12-13) indicates, this is played out in a universal narrative schema, of which the romance is a typical case:

...the story is basically threefold, a repetitive cycle. First the monster mysteriously appears from shadows into a placid unsuspecting world, with reports first being disbelieved, discounted, explained away, or ignored. Then there is depredation and destruction, causing an awakening. Finally the community reacts, unites, and , gathering its forces under a hero-saint, confronts the beast. Great rejoicing follows, normalcy returns. Temporarily thwarted by this setback, the monster (or its kin) returns at a later time, and the cycle repeats itself. Formulaic and predictable, the dialectic is predictable to the point of ritualism...

Of course, not all monsters are portrayed in the romance as narrative schema. Other narrative structures are, however, primed by the actions implied by their descriptive features. For example, monsters catch and devour humans (they are cannibals), they engage in sexually promiscuous acts (like the mermaids); they worship the devil and partake in human sacrifices, etc.

Despite narrowing down the category of the monster, Gilmore (2002) succeeds in (1) providing an insightful analysis of the defining features of the category of the monster, (ii) in providing a metaphorical interpretation – thus a double layer of meaning - of the features of the monster (*à la* psycho-analytical theory) both of which (iii) motivate the stereotypical narrative structure of a large number of monster stories – a formula which itself enables us to understand monster stories, such as horror movies, and even to predict how they will end.

### **3. Conclusion**

As should be clear from the discussion above, monsterology provides lexicographers with a rich descriptive vocabulary for lexicographic explanations/definitions of *monster*. It also stresses the need to define in more detail, with the help of ICMs, such as the Great Chain of Being, precisely how monsters deviate from the categories that make up the worlds of language users. Besides defining the category in more detail, numerous studies also provide insight into the metaphorical functioning of monsters and thus of the metaphorical meanings they have for language users. Lastly, both their literal and figurative meanings motivate the essential narratives in which monsters partake. Such narratives essentially provide coherence to the various definitional features of members of the category of monsters.

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## Section 9. Lexicological Issues of Lexicographical Relevance

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