On Lexicon and Grammar

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Abstract
The 'lexicon' considered as the *entire inventory of words in a language* has recently come to the fore-front. Such emphasis at times appears to be explainable as reaction to previous denials of the role of the lexicon in language, or to attempts to marginalise lexemes in analyses inspired by the theoretical view that *in re* lexemes are a kind of inert matter, a filler of independent syntactic modules.
From the point of view of theoretical semiotics (or of semiotically and theoretically aware linguistics) – not just the lexicon, but all the semiotic dimensions of a sign in a particular language, and of the parts into which that sign can be articulated, are equally "central", although none of these is conceivable without correlation to the others.
For those who learn or speak a language, learning and knowing how to use what we call a lexeme (or, more commonly, a word) has a didactic, psychological and social importance: learning a word and knowing how to use it correctly always involves learning to understand and use (1) its phonology, (2) the potential of at least a group of meanings that are correlated to it, (3) the grammar and morphology that each word carries (its possible collocation among the *partes orationis* of a language, hence its flex-ional and syntagmatic-distributive potential, and its possible collocation in the derivational mechanisms of a language) and (4), in most languages and linked to the above, its syntactic potential.
The validity of lexico-grammar has to be pointed up on the condition however that this is not under-stood and practised as a totality but as one part (important but not totalising) alongside others such as lexico-phonology, lexico-morphology, lexico-syntax and lexico-semantics.

1.

By 'lexicon' we mean the entire inventory of words in a language, reserving the term 'dictionary' (a "book about words", *Wörterbücher*) for its metalinguistic representations and the term 'vocabulary' for subsets (whether *in re* or metalinguistic) of that inventory. Today, the "centrality" of the lexicon has come to the forefront. Such emphasis at times appears to be a kind of *excusatio non petita*, perhaps explainable as a reaction to previous denials of the role of the lexicon in language, or to attempts to marginalise lexemes in analyses inspired by the theoretical view that *in re* lexemes are a kind of inert matter, a filler of independent syntactic modules.

In order to go beyond such ideas (which as of late seem to be truly in crisis),[1] it must be remembered that from a general theoretical point of view – in other words, from the point of

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view of theoretical semiotics (or of semiotically and theoretically aware linguistics) – not just the lexicon, but all the semiotic dimensions of a sign in a particular language, and of the parts into which that sign can be articulated, are equally "central": the dimension of phonological or graphical expression of the signifier, the phonology, no less than the morphological and syntactical dimension, the semantic no less than the pragmatic.[2] None of these is conceivable without correlation to the others. All equally serve to tie together – in ways that vary from one language to another – the concrete enunciations called *parole*, made up of concrete expressions and concrete meanings, to signs and phrases which can be correlated to other possible signs and phrases in the language in question, and all consisting of (or decomposable and analysable in) morpho-syntactical modules made up of elements of primary articulation, i.e. morphs or monemes.

Another thing can and must be said about the relationship between the learner or user and a language. For those who learn or speak a language, learning and knowing how to use what we call a lexeme (or, more commonly, a word) has a didactic, psychological and social importance. Learning the use of words to understand and to be understood is the doorway to the world of a particular language and only by crossing that doorway, by having crossed it, does language – i.e. the innate faculty possessed by the human species – ward off atrophy and, becoming activated, endure. There is no contradiction in recognising this centrality, so long as it is also understood that learning a word and knowing how to use it correctly always involves learning to understand and use: (1) its phonology, (2) the potential of at least a group of meanings that are correlated to it and that, through the activity of speakers, confer upon it the *dúnamis*, the potential to mean, the meaning,[3] (3) the grammar and morphology that each word carries (its possible collocation among the *partes orationis* of a language, hence its flexional and syntagmatic-distributive potential, and its possible collocation in the derivational mechanisms of a language) and (4), in most languages[4] and linked to the above, its

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[2] For the interaction of these four dimensions in all signs of all languages, please refer to De Mauro, *Guida all'uso delle parole*, 1a ed., Editori Riuniti, Rome 1980, pp. 34-36, and to Id., *Minisemantica dei linguaggi non verbali e delle lingue*, 1a ed., Laterza, Bari 1982, pp. 20-25. The view presented here seeks to integrate the three dimensions of the sign identified by Charles Morris (semantic-referential, syntactic and pragmatic) and the three identified by Karl Bühler (representational, conative, expressive).

[3] Considering the meaning as *dúnamis* and not as the thing meant, *semainómenon*, appears to be a trait differentiating the Epicurean concept of language (Philod. *De signis* 31, Diog. Oen. 12) from the well known Stoic view. Many years ago (*Introduzione alla semantica*, Laterza, Bari-Rome 19651, especially pp. 192-96) I argued in favour of this active concept of meaning and, in spite of a search for a better one, I have not found sufficient reason to abandon it. Recently, Roberto Gusmani (*Ambiguità terminologiche*, in Vincenzo Orioles (ed.), *Dal 'paradigma' alla parola. Riflessioni sul metalinguaggio della linguistica*, Il Calamo, Rome, 2001, pp.61-66) has suggested seeing in Saussure's term *signifiè* the appropriation and translation not of "what is meant" (equivalent to the Stoics' *semainómenon*), but the appropriation and translation of the Latin noun *significatus* "act of meaning". It is an interesting hypothesis which, if confirmed, would contribute to reinforcing the interpretation which – for other reasons as well – must be given to Saussure's concept.

[4] Mark Aronoff has maintained that "morphology is inherently unnatural. It is a disease, a pathology of language", (quoted and acutely discussed in Anna M. Thornton's excellent treatise, *Morfologia*, Carocci, Rome 2005, pp. 161-72 – the quotation of Aronoff is on p. 161, taken from a 1998 work). Obviously, as Aronoff does not fail to recall in the same context, morphology is, so to say, a true pandemic: the only languages to save themselves from it are those,

syntactic potential. The road to the empowerment of a language starts from here: from beginning to learn and gradually to possess individual words; and with individual words their phonology and, then, little by little, the phonology of a language; their morphologicality and grammaticality, and then, little by little, the morphology and grammar of a language; their syntax and, with that, progressively, the syntax of a language; their meanings and then, again progressively, the noetic horizon of expressions of a language.[5]

Attentive scholars, such as the late Maurice Gross and Annibale Elia, have highlighted the validity of lexico-grammar.[6] Good enough, on the condition however that this is not understood and practised as a totality but as one part (important but not totalising) alongside others such as lexico-phonology, lexico-morphology, lexico-syntax and lexico-semantics; all parts of that comprehensive exploration of languages as, not just *viables*, but effectively *vivantes*;[7] that is, as transient arrival points of the convergence of the *masses parlantes* towards certain *langues* in a particular historical *temps*; and therefore, as historical-cultural (or, if one prefers, socio-linguistic) expressions of that capacity to organise and transmit unlimited experiences which is the verbal *langage* consigned to the human race, and to communities and individuals who are part thereof, by the genetic patrimony, the *phúsis* of the ancients.

I will now seek to arrange and discuss at least some of the points implicit in the above affirmations.

2.

Over the 20th century the notion of a system – used by historical-comparative linguistics since the early 19th century to categorise grammatical data – has repeatedly inspired analy-

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not very many, of the isolating languages that best represent the ideal of a perfect isolating language. From a general semiotic and theoretical viewpoint, Aronoff's affirmation is less disconcerting than at first appears. Morphology in the strict sense (that is, grammar understood as the entire array of inflectional paradigms) can well be lacking. What cannot be lacking in any articulated code, and therefore in languages, and that concerns all signs and all their morphs (or monemes or however else we wish to call the primary units of articulation) is what the scholars of logic and semiotics in the 1930s taught (or should have taught) us to call the *syntactic* dimension: the perennial reference of each sign and phrase, and of each of their morphs (even in telegraphic texts of inflective languages, even in merely naming signs, such as emblems and the like), to other potential signs, phrases and morphs of the same language, and the correlative value that these referring morphs acquire with and by such referral. Morphology in the strict sense, if not a semiotic necessity, is nonetheless a powerful means for the determination of syntactical relationships, alongside the determinations arising from distribution. Against Chomsky's idea of grammar as a pure accident, *lusus*, of human intelligence, it must also be added that grammaticality is an equally powerful way to determine the relationship between the sign and the situation in which it is used, vital for putting the potential of a language into effect in phrases and texts, and in their enunciation and comprehension. It is no coincidence that grammar in the strict sense is lacking in those articulated codes in which formalisation reaches the point of cancelling pragmatic variables, as in mathematical calculations.

[5] On the incremental nature of the lexicon and of learning it cf. Silvana Ferreri, *L'alfabetizzazione lessicale. Studi di linguistica educativa*, Aracne, Rome 2005, pp. 11-41; further information and material in Isabella Chiari, Tullio De Mauro (ed.), *Parole e numeri. Analisi quantitative dei fatti di lingua*, Aracne, Rome 2005.

[6] Annibale Elia, *Le verbe italien*, Schena-Mizet, Paris-Bari 1984.

[7] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 2° ed., Payot, Paris 1922, pp. 112-13, Italian translation, Laterza, Bari-Rome 1967I, pp. 95-97.

ses of the lexicon. It seemed that considering the lexicon as a system or structure helped to explain various factors.

(1) In the first place, especially in inflective and amalgamating languages through their usage of different inflectional classes (but also in isolating languages through their usage of classifiers and syntagmatic distributions), the lexemes of a language can all be organised in distinct *partes orationis*, and this gives lexicons the air, not of a disorganised jumble, but of groups of formally coherent classes. (2) In the second place, the array of lexemes is given coherence by the fact that they can be analysed and etymologised in a synchronic relationship with a certain number of derivative or compositional regularities. (3) In the third place, lexemes follow syntactic regularities correlated with (1) and (2); thus, for example, a lexical base may be moved from one category to another so long as these regularities are respected in such a way that the base so moved acquires the syntactic constraints, contours and potentials of the category of arrival. (4) Finally, the systematic nature of the lexicon appeared within reach at the level of lexical semantics when (a) it was hoped to reduce the multiform and elusive reality of meanings to a combination of a closed group, i.e., of a system with a limited number of distinctive traits, such that the meaning of the Italian lexeme *toro* is a result of the combination "LIVING+MALE+ADULT+(NON HUMAN) BOVINE", each trait re-emerging in other combinations, LIVING in *ragazza, tranviere* or *passerotto*, MALE in *guerriero* or *pompiere*, ADULT in *gallina* or *professore*, (NON HUMAN) BOVINE in *vacca, mucca, manzo, vitello, bovide, bufalo, zebù*; (b) it appeared that another aspect of the systematic nature of meanings was to be found in the connection between the acceptations of a single word or number of words and generally applicable models, *nomen agentis* versus *nomen instrumenti* (*accenditore, accumulatore, affrancatrice* etc.), *nomen actionis* versus *nomen rei* (*discesa, salita, uscita*), and in the traditional division between specific meanings and extensive and/or metaphorical meanings in accordance with the traditional configurations of rhetoric.[8]

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[8] It is worth noting how, as in other areas of the description of language, still-useful precedents are to be found in Greek and Latin treatises. From within the world of rhetoric, ideas emerged concerning the linguistic and semiotic possibilities of the reformulation of discourses and, in particular, of the physiological semantic mobility of words. In *De Oratore* Cicero writes (III 40, 161): *nihil est in rerum natura cuius nos non in aliis rebus possimus uti vocabulo et nomine; unde enim simile duci potest – potest autem ex omnibus – indidem verbum unum, quod similitudinem continet, tralatum lumen afferet orationi*, "in the nature of things, there is nothing the appellation and name of which cannot be used in [reference to] other things; whence, indeed, can be drawn an [element, aspect] – and indeed it is possible from all things – a word containing the similarity, transferred, will being light to the discourse" (in my translation, I have sought to maintain the ambiguous position and the ambiguous meaning of *tralatum*: "word" or "light"?). Elsewhere, Cicero himself does not fail to note that there is a cultural component involved in pushing towards or in blocking a metaphorical development. Quintilian, at least in one particular case, adds an interesting note (VIII 2, 7): *vertex*, from its acceptation of "whirl" passes in good Latin to the acceptations "vortex (of wind)" (cf. *vertigo, vertiginosus* "one who suffers from vertigo"), then "swirl of hair on the nape of the neck", and "top of the head", and finally, in classical Latin, "peak of a mountain, great height" (cf. Italian, *vertiginoso* "producing vertigo because of great height"). To these acceptations we have added, as late and modern continuators of *vertex*: "peak of a geometrical figure" (cf. Italian *verticale*), "ruling group of a social class, of a political party, of a commercial company" and finally (for now) "meeting of leaders of different countries, *summit, caucus*" (cf. Italian *verticismo, verticistico*). Later I will explain the reason for these parenthetical observations on derivatives. Quintilian, then, encour-

3.

We have highlighted the advantages of using the idea of system in describing the lexicon of a language. Let us now consider the difficulties involved in considering the lexicon of a language to be per se a system.

Speaking generally, it is true that – to re-appropriate the terms used by Kant on the subject of 'system' – we may recognise in the lexicons of languages phenomena of expansion *per intussusceptionem*, i.e., specific to a system in the strict sense, such as an organism that grows or a system of axioms that is enriched with new theorems, etc. Words, or rather morphs or sintemi assumed as a lexical base, plus rules of derivation and composition, give rise to new words or sintemi. Yet, equally present is expansion *per coacervationem*, such as in a pile of grain, a mass of stars and galaxies, or a growing city: situations that over time reorganise themselves into new equilibriums by and with unpredictable external additions. In the case of languages this comes about by the influx of neologisms, either borrowed or invented, by the breakdown of distinctions between signifier and sintemi due to phonological factors, etc. Moreover, further weakening the transferability of the idea of system in the strict intussusceptive sense, is the continual phenomenon of obsolescence which often cancels precisely what, in an earlier period to the one being considered, were the lexical bases; as in the case of *civico* and *civile* in twentieth-century Italian, or *lacustre* and *lacuale, piovasco* and *piovoso* – deprived of *cive, laco, piova* which in a remote synchronic phase were their normal bases of derivation. The contemporaneous presence of unsystematic neologies and obsolescence has general theoretical justification only if we abandon the idea that the lexicon is *in re* a system, and we recognise its true nature, not only open but altogether variable, incremental and decremental. If from the entire mass of lexemes extant in a language – i.e., those used non sporadically (not as *nonce* or *occasional words*) in discourses and texts that in terms of phonology, morpho-syntax and fundamental vocabulary refer to a single language (we know today that this mass is very difficult to quantify, the ongoing calculation of its vast extension being in the order of many millions) – we move our attention to idiolectic lexicons, the oscillations between them and within each of them over time are just as important and, once again, render it hard to explain the phenomena of comprehensibility, which take place even with unequal possession of the lexicon – something that would be unimaginable if understanding came about by way of a calculation working on a closed system of units and their values.

In particular, in order to understand the limits of points (1)-(3), it must be observed that, though at times marginal in dictionary definitions, there are lexical elements such as primary

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ages us to realise that the acceptance of the various metaphorical meanings of a particular word is the result of a sinuous, un-predetermined, diachronic process. Finally, a point repeatedly reiterated by the ancient treatises is that tropes are not (or not always and necessarily) a supplementary and ornamental pastime. *Katákhresis* or *abusio* becomes necessary also because of the penury of specific words already extant, *inopiae causa* says Cicero shortly before the above quoted passage (III 38,155). Even more clearly did Tryfon (*Trop.* 191,12) identify the *trópos katà tò anagkaîon*, the semantic dilation that responds to the need (a need that emerges and first finds response in the *parole*, but that is of *langue*) to find adequate words to speak about the *akatonómaston*, that which has not yet been named and verbalised.

interjections (oh, mmm), secondary (Italian, cavolo!) and deformed secondary (perhaps the same cavolo, diamine, perdindirindina) interjections, interjectional phonosymbols (toc toc) and nouns (*il toc toc alla porta mi ha sorpreso*), and, finally, acronyms that cannot be inflectionally classified (*ONU, CNR*) and that largely elude, as do many eteroglottical borrowings, the normal derivational mechanisms of a language. Part of this material is difficult to insert into syntactical regularities.

More radical objections concern point (4), the reduction of lexical meanings to a system. There are factual objections of a general nature: the extendibility of the lexicon makes it necessary to recognise that the supposed system of semantic traits is necessarily open, and that therefore it is not a system in the strict sense (which, we should recall, involves the closure of its constitutive elements). Moreover, the hypothetical possibility of referring a meaning to an ordered whole of traits clashes against the coexistence within a single meaning of different acceptations, against the extendibility of the meaning to new heterogeneous senses, and against the more or less marked cancellation of those traits in polyrematics.[9] There are also more specific objections: as we suggested earlier (*supra*, no. 6), the derivatives of a lexical base and, it should be added, the composites, distributed above all in an unpredictable fashion, select only a part of the presumed lexical traits (compare, in modern Italian, *classifica* with *classista*, *tangentista* with *tangenziale* in a geometric or town-planning sense, *verticale* in the geometric or gymnastic sense with *verticistico*, *portabagagli* or *portabandiera* with *portabacchetta* or *portaombrelli*, etc.). In general, once again, the systematic view of meanings is forced to overlook all the idiosyncratic phenomena of the articulation of meaning into acceptations, and of the semantic connections between derivatives and bases. Finally, and again in general, there is an epistemological objection, already raised by Giulio Lepschy, yet also encumbered with practical difficulties: while the phonological traits that define a phoneme belong to a metalanguage that describes phonemes, but are not themselves phonemes, the traits that define the meaning of words in componential analyses are themselves words – such as ADULT or BOVINE etc. – in need of a definition and exposed to oscillations of meanings and acceptations like the other words of a language.

4.

Critically marking the limits of the systematic notion of lexicon reopens the way to a renewed consideration of the lexicon in relation to the overall working of languages. What must first be acquired is an understanding of the radical contrast between, on the one hand, the finite and incomplete nature, or if you prefer, the permanent imperfection of the means and forms a language offers its speakers, and on the other hand, the fact that nonetheless those same means and forms offer speakers, according to Søren Kierkegård's evocative assertion, the means to combat the inexpressible; they are adjusted and integrated in such a way that it becomes possible to meet the need to accept and express novelty.

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[9] On the gradation of polyrhematics cf. T. De Mauro-Miriam Voghera, *Scala mobile. Un punto di vista sui lessemi complessi*, in P. Benincà, G. Cinque, T. De Mauro, N. Vincent (ed.), *Italiano e dialetti nel tempo. Saggi di grammatica per Giulio C. Lepschy*, Bulzoni editore, Rome 1996, pp.99-131.

The idea that a permanent interplay, a dialectic, between the finiteness of means and the infinity of necessities and expressive possibilities permeates and animates *lógoi* and *sermones* appeared at intervals in Greek and Latin culture, in early Christianity and in certain philosophies of the early modern period, especially Leibniz's *Consilium de nova Encyclopaedia conscribenda*. The full thematisation of this idea, the clear identification of a privileged relationship between the reality of a language with its forms and functions, and the notion of infinity, was established in linguistic theory beginning with Wilhelm von Humboldt.[10] Taken up again at the beginning of the 20th century by Saussure then, with improved logical-formal instruments, by Louis Hjelmslev and Noam Chomsky, the idea has been successively developed in various perspectives, differing but far less contrasting than has been believed.[11]

The retrieval of this idea makes it possible to recompose diverging perspectives and trends into units and achieve a vision, an overall view more sensitive than others to the role of the lexicon. It makes it possible to thematise the permanent incompleteness and continual completabililily of each of world's distinct historical-natural languages, which we today consider as numbering 7,000. How, using a language, do its speakers and writers deal with the frequent emergence of previously unknown human and artistic experiences, new sensitivities, new theoretical and practical knowledge, new techniques? How, in what way (to recall alongside Kierkegård in his *Stages on Life's Way*, also Dante and his own extraordinary experience (*Inferno* XXXII 7-10) of the very matter to which we are referring here), how can even the most trite and humble language (the language of the marketplace and the home, as

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[10] W. von Humboldt, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwickelung des Menschengeschlechts*, hggb. von A.F.Pott, Berlin 1883, § 13, p.119: « Denn sie [*die Sprache*] steht ganz eigentlich einem unendlichen und wahrhaft gränzlosen Gebiete, dem Inbegriff alles Denkbaren. Gegenüber. Sie muss daher von endlichen Mitteln einen unendlichen Gebrauch machen, und vermag dies durch die Identität der Gedanken und Sprache erzeugenden Kraft». Italian translation by Donatella Di Cesare, *La diversità delle lingue*, Laterza. Bari 2000³, p.79, for discussion and interpretation of this passage, Ead., *Introduzione*, pp.LXIV-LXVI.

[11] On the effective convergence of different perspectives in opening the way to a new vision of reality, both the internal reality of languages and external reality, important considerations have already been made by Lorenzo Renzi, *Introduzione*, pp. 9-29, especially pp. 12-17 (*Il plurilinguismo*), 21-24 (*Paralleli su scala mondiale*), and *Teorie linguistiche moderne*, pp. 55-73, in Lorenzo Renzi, Michele Cortelazzo, *La lingua italiana oggi: un problema scolastico e sociale*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1977. Other references in T. De Mauro, *Minisemantica dei linguaggi non verbali e delle lingue*, Laterza, Bari 1982¹, 2000⁶, pp. 39-42 (infiniteness of the signs of a code, 70-84), 46-53 (forms of creativity), 90-94 (rule-changing creativity), 95-132 (variability of meaning of individual words), 133-40 (unlimitedness of the noetic field of a language). Note that the contrast will be less the more linguists, learning from geographers, come to realise that their representations of a language are precisely that; i.e., representations, alternative projections variously useable to different ends. Borges, with his epistemological tale of the Cartographers of the Empire, is there to remind us that all representations are necessarily limited with respect to the multiform variety of reality. As with a good map, such representations should be accompanied by a declaration of the scale, the rules of construction and projection or, as some people rightly point out, the metalanguage. The representations should be judged (1) for their coherence with respect to these explications (2) for their consistency, given the scale and rules, to the objects represented, and (3) for their functionality in terms of the aims for which they were constructed.

Søren Kierkegård said, Dante's *lingua che chiami mamma e babbo*), be stretched and extended to include among the meanings of its words and phrases, and *discriver* with its usual forms, the darkest and *deepest* places of the *universe*?

There are various ways in which the speakers who use a language – that is, an articulated semiological code possessing the constituent properties of any language[12] – make that undefined, indeed potentially infinite, mass of possible meanings their own, and manage to construct expressions, accomplishing that act which Louis Hjelmslev considered a distinctive trait of languages with respect to other semiotics and that Ivor Richards described as "the most complex act of the cosmos":[13] the translation (i.e., the assumption of each possible meaning) from the texts and signs of all other languages and semiotics, into each and any language. I will try and list at least seven ways open to real speakers (some of them connected to the characteristics outlined in no. 4):

(1)   The recursive nature of languages' rules of syntax, and therefore the potential infinity of phrases that can be generated even from restricted or closed lexical groups (if ever they were so, and we have already seen that they are not).

(2)   The violability of syntactic rules and the associated utilization of the incompleteness of the utterances of which phrases are composed, with potential extempore meaningfulness of the violations and interruptions through connections with the situational context.

(3)   The permanent connection with the situation of use (including that particular situation which is the more strongly formal use, tending to universality, of scientific and philosophical languages). One single phrase, with the lexemes of which it is composed, adjusts to assume different, unpredictable meanings, depending on the diversity of the context and of differences in its vocal (and graphic) expression.

(4)   The formal, morphological-grammatical, nature of the ties with the context and the users, and the involvement of each lexical unit in the grammaticality of a language.

(5)   The capacity of each lexeme to dilate and contract, also with respect to (3), i.e., to the situation of use.

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[12] We will mention three such properties, to which we will return: the flou-like quality of the signifiés of a language's lexical and (also) grammatical morphs, which favours restrictions and extensions of acceptations and an undefined potential synonymy; grammaticality, i.e., a system of classifiers, deictic morphs and grammatical morphs – prefixed, infixed or desinential – aimed at formally establishing relationships between the utterance of a phrase and the situation in which the phrase occurs (verbal context, situational context, time, place, actors of the enunciation); the possibility of a reflexive epilinguistic and metalinguistic use of morphs to declare their own form and function.
[13] Ivor A. Richards, *Toward a Theory of Translating*, in A. F. Wright (ed.), *Studies in Chinese Thought*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1953, pp. 247-62, a p. 250. On the theoretical and general importance of translatability, please refer to T. De Mauro, «Quantum fieri potest». *Riflessioni sulla traduzione (im)possibile*, «Rivista liturgica» XCII (2005), 1, pp. 13-48.

(6)   The auto-onimia and, more generally, the reflexive metalinguistic use of any word to explain and ask explanation of any other word.

(7)   If points (1) and (4) are compatible with the nature of a system *stricto sensu*, i.e., one that expands *per intussusceptionem*, the seventh and final way by which speakers of languages render both languages and themselves capable of dealing with the changing horizons of life and culture compels us to recognise the trans-systematic nature of the continual abandonment, not only of individual words and the assumption of new individual words, but of entire formative schemes of words, which vary the lexical mass and go so far as to affect and vary the morpho-syntactical and phono-morphological structures of a language. In the terms used by Kant, we find ourselves facing a whole which, undergoing the more or less obligatory pressures of the *masses parlantes*, expands or contracts *per coacervationem*, like a pile of words, as a function of the necessities of usage. This causes, on the one hand, the abandonment of old knowledge and old experiences and social practices, which can lead to obsolescence of words or of their acceptations or to radical new meanings and, on the other hand, creates a perceived need to redefine with new lexical instruments that which is already known, which is too often left in the shade, and to distinguish and identify (using *ad hoc* lexical instruments or new acceptations) new knowledge and new experiences and practices.[14]

This is the theoretical place whence we can contemplate the lexical mass. Its intrinsic permanent variability, already familiar to Horace, is at once numerical (through the addition or loss of lexical morphs), morphological-syntactical (through variations induced also by numerical variability) and, finally, semantic (through the loss of acceptations of surviving words, through specifications or restrictions, and through the possibility of rearticulating each meaning into new families of meaning, into new acceptations). This variability, in all its aspects, serves the need for expression and knowledge of individuals who recognise themselves in a human community which, in order to survive, has a continual need to adapt its lexical-linguistic heritage to the needs of its life and survival. This is the biological and ethological root that makes it necessary for human beings to possess formal instruments, semantically unlimited and indeterminate, whenever they have to abandon abstraction and adopt new determinations in unpredictable directions. In the variability of the immense lexical mass of languages, especially the written languages of complex societies,[15] a central role is played by the obsolescence of lexemes and/or their acceptations, and by the new influxes of morphs and of acceptations of already-extant morphs.

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[14] Further references in T. De Mauro, "Quantum fieri potest", op. cit note 13; and in *Crisis of Linguistic Monolithism and Role of Minority Languages*, op. cit note 1.

[15] See T. De Mauro, *La Fabbrica delle parole*, UTET-Libreria, Turin 2005, and *Dove nascono i neologismi?*, in G. Adamo, V. Della Valle, *Che fine fanno i neologismi?*, Acts of the Conference *Lessico Intellettuale Europeo* – Accademia del Lincei, Rome 2006, pp. 23-31.

5.

There are various procedures for organising the immense and fluctuating mass of lexical elements. It is possible to provide a specific list of the procedures that a good dictionary can and must take into account when seeking to represent, if not to adapt, the complexity of the lexicon.

There is an obvious and not altogether banal positive procedure: firstly, placement in alphabetical order. This is the system that, from the ancient glossaries to Uguccione's medieval *Derivationes*, to Calepinus and the dictionaries of the modern age, has shown itself to be the most useful and the most accessible, much more so than conceptual listings, or ordering by lexical roots under which derivatives appear, as is the case in Arabic and other oriental languages, and in many etymological dictionaries. Gianni Rodari wrote a humorous poem:[16] *L'imperatore, l'impiegato, l'impiastratore,/ l'impiccato/ vivono nella stessa pagina/ e non si dicono mai: Buon giorno, come sta?* This undoubted drawback is largely compensated by the ease and equality of access which the alphabetic ordering guarantees, at least to the literate. It is, however, an extrinsic order, superimposed upon the reality of the words.

The intrinsic orders in which and by which each lexeme can be positioned are different. I will enumerate them briefly, although each poses further problems that differ from language to language and all, as could be shown analytically, tend to implicate one another:

(1)   Classification, both phonological and graphic, syllabic and accentual.

(2)   Frequency of occurrence and textual distribution, i.e., the statistical stratification of the lexicon and of each word in corpora representative of a language.

(3)   Subsequent assessment and specific indication of the range and field of use of each word: a few thousand words are indispensable in all contexts because of the great frequency with which they appear and the grammatical role they play; others, although appearing rarely, especially in writing, are necessary in private and public exchanges for their elevated degree of *Alltäglichkeit*, the everyday importance of their meanings; a few tens of thousands are known and useable outside specific fields by people of average culture; others, finally, are characterised by their belonging, either completely or in some acceptations, to more sophisticated, specific and specialised areas of use.

(4)   Categorisation of the grammatical form – and the associated reference to specific flexional paradigms and to even more specific idiosyncrasies (in other words, morphology in the strict sense) – and of syntactic properties.

(5)   Internal etymological stratification and filiation; i.e., assessment of the lexical bases from which a word derives, and of the derivatives and composites of which each word is the base (morphology in the broad sense).

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[16] Gianni Rodari, *Coabitazione*, in *Parole per giocare*, presentation by T. De Mauro, illustrations by F. Tonucci, "Biblioteca di lavoro", Manzuoli editore, Florence 1979, p. 12.

(6)   External etymological stratification; i.e., assessment of the other languages from which a word may be derived.

(7)   The variety of acceptations and of sense relationships with other words of similar or contrary meaning, and the semantic field or semantic fields to which the word, depending upon its acceptations, belongs.

(8)   The relationship with the words it most often accompanies, in normal syntagma or in *expressions figèes*, complex lexemes or, as is also said, in polyrhematics.

Points (4) and (8) are those in which the link between lexemes and grammaticality appears most clearly. Yet let it once again be stressed that such a link works *in re* and must be presented in analyses "gegeben den ganzen übrigen Mechanismus", "given the whole of the rest of the mechanism", the reality of which is that of a *Lebensform*,[17] in the sense that internal factors, indispensable parts, are, in the case of historical-natural languages, the *temps*, a particular historical temporality, and the *masse parlante*.[18]

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[17] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Philosophical Investigations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 19531, §§ 6 (but cf. also 20), 19.

[18] F.de Saussure, *op. loc. cit.* at note 7. Just as Wittgenstein had a problem with the *Ganzheit* of reference to the overall mechanism, so Saussure had some difficulty with the reference to the schematic entirety of language; more than in the lessons collated in the *Cours* this transpires in the *Scritti inediti di linguistica generale*, a c. T. De Mauro, Laterza, Bari-Rome 2005, § 6 *c* and n. 38. And for both men, independently of one another, the notion of *Spiel* and *jeu de signes* presents itself as an interpretative key for escaping the contradictions of a systematic, calculating, monolithic concept of languages.