

# SOME ASPECTS OF AMBIGUITY

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In this paper my point is first to focus the ways ambiguity can arise from various points of views, secondly to throw a light on the two modern schemes of semantic changes and lastly proceed to some factors causing semantic change.

We ought to distinguish a number of different kinds of vagueness in language, for the term itself is used rather variously in connection with meaning in the usage of different writers, and some of the phenomena to which it refers have other designations. In fact, at least four different uses of the word can be recognized.<sup>1</sup>

It is understandable that ambiguity sometimes be known as vagueness, for in cases of ambiguity there is hesitation on the part of the interpreter (and sometimes, it appears, on the part of the speaker or writer) between two or more possible meanings of a word. Ambiguity relates to polysemy, or multiple-meaning, and arises usually when the word's context is itself ambiguous, or is insufficiently precise to lead the interpreter to a decisive choice among several possible meanings. There is little in this situation which would conduce to change of meaning; rather, the situation is itself a consequence of change of meaning, in so far as polysemy has this origin.<sup>2</sup>

Then again, words of a high degree of generality, or abstraction, e.g. *thing, business, act, case, circumstance, fact, way, respect, matter, good, bad, do, go*, are sometimes known as vague words. The vagueness in question here is of a different kind, however—not any kind of hesitation or uncertainty about the meaning of the word, but an agreement to be general rather than particular. The vocabulary of our ordinary language here and there resembles the natural historian's phyletic trees or the logician's classificatory systems, in that its members can be arranged in rough hierarchies from particular to general. This fact affords the speaker a choice, in terms of delicacy of reference, on any individual occasion. Words like *thing, case*, etc., which have few limiting criteria and are therefore wide in application, are vague in a deliberate and necessary way; there are times when the purposes of speech can be served better by such words than by more particular ones. The same applies to certain general words of quantity like *some, often, likely, soon, huge*, which enable us to speak about a far greater variety of topics than would be possible if we always had to state an exact numerical quantity or range of quantities.<sup>3</sup>

A third use of vagueness is in the sense of variation among different speakers as to the precise definition of the word. This is particularly likely to be true of moral and political terms such as *honour, justice, wicked, fair, culture, education, conservative, democratic*. There is, in fact, a constant tug of war among us for the possession of these words and they are quite often subject to legislative redefinition in a way which will be described later. If you succeed in giving your own definition wide enough currency, no

matter if it began as a solecism, it becomes one of the meanings in the language and will eventually be noticed by the lexicographers.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, there is a kind of vagueness in words which we may call indeterminacy. Consider words for parts of the body: *shoulder, neck, lip*; or for times of day: *morning, afternoon, evening*; there is another kind of vagueness here, as we may easily confirm if we think of the difficulty we should have, for instance, in saying exactly where the neck ends and the shoulder begins. This is not a question of disagreement about different senses, or of abstraction, or polysemy; it is just that no decision has ever been taken on the precise limits of application of these words and ordinarily no one feels it necessary. In classifying things for the purposes of linguistic reference we often impose arbitrary lines of demarcation on our experience; certain lines, however, are too difficult to draw, beyond a certain degree of delicacy, while others are patently too arbitrary and unnecessary even to be considered. Here we have a kind of solution to the ancient philosophical puzzle about how many hairs a man must lose before he becomes bald, or at exactly what age an unmarried woman turns into an old maid! These are indeterminate words and we cannot therefore expect exact definitions of them.<sup>5</sup>

Indeterminacy affects more than details of the form of referents. Function too may be involved and a frequent form of indeterminacy is that which occurs between formal and functional criteria.<sup>6</sup>

In any case, most people would wish to distinguish a word's associations from its meaning and in as much as the semantic structure of the vocabulary consists of necessary connections between words by virtue of their meanings, it is rather to connotations that we should turn.

In the strict logical sense, it will be remembered, the sense which was established by John Stuart Mill, connotation stands close to definition. A word's connotations are the set of defining or necessary attributes by virtue of which we can apply the word to a part of our experience; in other words, they are the criteria for the referential use of the word. Now this strict use of connotation is in danger of being replaced by a more popular use which equates connotation with association. This may be simply an example of the general tendency for technical words to become less precise when they pass into popular use; on the other hand it is quite probable that it indicates that the dividing line between connotations and associations is not as sharp in practice as it is in theory. One might wonder, for instance, whether skill is a necessary attribute of an athlete—not, that is, whether athletes ought to show skill, but whether skill is one of the criteria for the correct use of the word or merely a frequent association. This vagueness at the borderline between connotations and associations does not invalidate the distinction itself, however, though it may in the course of time affect the meaning: associations can become criteria and criteria can become associations.<sup>7</sup>

Ambiguity is a linguistic condition which can arise in a variety of ways. From a purely linguistic point of view there are three main forms of ambiguity; phonetic, grammatical and lexical.

(1) Ambiguity may result, in spoken language, from the phonetic structure of the sentence. Since the acoustic unit of connected speech is the breath-group, not the individual word, it may happen that two breath-groups made up of different words become homonymous and thus potentially ambiguous. If this occurs often enough, it may leave a permanent mark on the language.<sup>8</sup>

(2) Another large group of ambiguities are caused by grammatical factors. There are two possibilities here: the equivoque may result from the ambiguousness of grammatical forms or from the structure of the sentence.<sup>9</sup>

(a) Many grammatical forms, free as well as bound, are ambiguous. Some prefixes and suffixes have more than one meaning, and this may, on occasion, create misunderstandings. The suffix *-able* does not mean the same thing in *desirable* or *readable* as it does in *eatable*, *knowable*, *debatable*. There are also homonymous prefixes and suffixes. The prefix *in-*, meaning 'into, within, towards, upon' (e.g. *indent*, *inborn*, *inbreeding*, *in-flame*), has a homonym in the prefix *in-* expressing negation or privation (e.g. *inappropriate*, *inexperienced*, *inconclusive*). Though the two enter into different combinations, they can occasionally give rise to confusion and uncertainty.<sup>10</sup>

Form-words too may have several meanings which may make for confusion in some contexts. When a married man is invited to a semi-official function in these terms: 'Will you join us for dinner tomorrow?', he often has to ask the awkward question: 'Do you mean *you* in the singular or in the plural?'<sup>11</sup>

(b) Another fertile source of grammatical ambiguity is equivocal phrasing. Here the individual words are unambiguous but their combination can be interpreted in two or more different ways. To take a trivial example, in the sentence: 'I met a number of old friends and acquaintances', the adjective *old* may be taken to refer either to both friends and acquaintances or only to the former.<sup>12</sup>

(3) By far the most important type of ambiguity, and the only one with which I am concerned, is that due to lexical factors.

(a) The same word may have two or more different meanings. This situation has been known since Bréal as 'polysemy'. The noun *board*, for example, may mean a thin plank, a tablet, a table, food served at the table, persons sitting at the council-table, and various other things. Normally, only one of these will fit into a given context, but occasionally there may be some confusion in people's minds.<sup>13</sup>

Polysemy is a fundamental feature of human speech, which can arise in five sources, four of them native, the fifth involving the influence of a foreign language.<sup>14</sup> A single word—i.e., a dictionary entry, or type—is said to be polysemous if it harbors more than one sense or meaning. Polysemy is thus flanked by two near neighbours:

On one side falls homonymy, in which different words turn up with identical sound-value—or, if we confine our attention to the written word, homography, in which the fortuitous identity is one of orthographic shape. Most homonyms arise from processes of sound-change producing accidental convergence of etymologically disparate forms. There are some exceptions—for example, "flower" and "flour" emerged from a common root via shifts in meaning,<sup>15</sup> and in other cases the difference is purely grammatical, as in

the tenses of "read." But generally speaking the border between homonymy and polysemy has proved rather clearly identifiable by the techniques of historical lexicography, and desk dictionaries typically do a dependable job of glossing homonyms separately. Ullmann cites an estimate of 1600–2000 for the entire English language. On all accounts, therefore this flank of polysemy is reasonably well protected.<sup>16</sup>

On the other side, however, falls generality, or diversity of application of a single sense; and this frontier is porous indeed, although like that between the front and back of the head it may seem secure enough at the outset. A typically bland illustration of generality is the diversity of objects we call "chair"; and polysemy, for its part, often reveals itself in the ambiguity of a single utterance-token or inscription. For example, "He just sprained his ankle" is ambiguous as between "He sprained it but a moment ago" and "He merely sprained it." Again, as mentioned, it is traditional to count as separate senses distinctions which run along part-of-speech lines, and this is usually (though not always) straightforward.

But subtler cases come quickly into view, where these sufficient conditions for polysemy fail to apply. Quine<sup>17</sup> discusses the following two: First consider "exists" as predicated of physical objects, numbers, and classes. Are there different senses of "exist" corresponding to different species of existents? Or is there simply one general sense, applicable to a diversity of existent things with appropriate adjustments of interpretation? Quine urges adoption of the latter view, against the wishes of certain intemperate metaphysicians; and in this case we think he is surely correct.

But now consider the second example—"hard" applied to chairs and questions. For this Quine needs a bit more apparatus, and he proposes a liberalized criterion of polysemy.

We may quite reasonably call a word ambiguous (and not merely general) if it has been conditioned to two very unlike classes of stimulations, each a close-knit class of mutually similar stimulations.

However, he now argues, even on this liberalized view "hard" is not ambiguous, for talk of "hard questions" is merely a figurative extension of ontogenetically prior usages of the "hard chair" type.<sup>18</sup>

This solution raises several important points. Let us propose a different analysis, according to the which "hard" is ambiguous, decomposing in its adjectival form into two coherent groups paraphrased thus: (1) difficult, trying, severe (including questions) and (2) unyielding, solid brittle (including chairs). This grouping "feels" more natural, based on a larger set of contexts; furthermore one can find sentences which seem (marginally) ambiguous in the appropriate manner—for example, "He is hard." But the point here is not really which analysis is correct, but rather that it is becoming difficult to determine which is correct. Furthermore, note that information about temporal relationships, etymological or ontogenetic, is not really relevant to the question of number of senses, although critical for study of patterns and mechanisms of sense development. What is really in question is the degree of semantic relatedness of usages. Whenever usage *A* is related to some coherent group of usages *B*, we are obliged to make a judge-

ment as to whether A is sufficiently remote from B to constitute a different sense. And this intuitive sense, is, choose to express it. Quine is comforted by talk of relations among classes of stimulations, but plainly it comes to the same thing.<sup>19</sup>

#### (1) Shifts

Shift is generally defined as the type of sense-development in which a marginal change occurs among the criteria of a lexical category. Shifts are on the whole less conspicuous than transfers and, perhaps because they smack of inadvertence, are more often regarded as illegitimate or deplorable. Every so often, a newspaper will print a letter from a reader objecting to some recent change in a word's use, evidence for the traditional meaning being provided by the letter-writer's dictionary. The word may, for instance, be 'sophisticated', which, it is noted, has recently been used in collocation with *ant*, *music*, *parachute*, *rocket*, *sampling*, *air*, *squadron*, *youth*, and a variety of other nouns. Dictionaries which have not been revised within the last twenty or thirty years will usually give definitions like 'adulterated, artificialized'. Of the major English dictionaries, only Webster's Third International recognizes the full range of senses which have developed recently, such as 'worldly wise', 'complex', 'supremely cultured', 'intellectually appealing'. These are not very wide departures from the earlier 'not simple', 'artificialized', but what obscures the connection is the complete reversal, in many contexts, of the word's earlier pejorative meaning. We ought not to feel affronted, in spite of what many dictionaries tell us, if we, or our works, are referred to as 'sophisticated'; in most people's minds, the word now conveys approval.<sup>20</sup>

When discussing the various forms of vagueness, we see words have a number of different aspects according to the contexts in which they are used.

Shifts in application are particularly noticeable in the use of adjectives since these are apt to change their meaning according to the noun they qualify. To take one of simple examples given by a Swedish scholar, Arne Rudskoger<sup>21</sup> the adjective *handsome* has been used, in the course of its history, in the following senses, grouped according to the noun to which they refer:

##### Persons:

1. Apt, skilled, clever.
2. Proper, fitting, decent.
3. Beautiful with dignity.

##### Concretes:

1. Easy to handle.
2. Of fair size.
3. Beautiful with dignity.
4. Proper, fitting (of dress)

##### Actions, speech:

1. Appropriate, apt, clever.

##### Conduct:

1. Fitting, seemly.
2. Gallant, brave.

3. Generous, magnanimous.

Sizes, sums:

1. Fair, moderately large.

2. Ample, liberal, munificent.

Most of these senses arose through shifts in application, though another factor, figurative usage, may also have been at work. Naturally, not all these meanings have survived. Dr. Rudskoger's conclusions concerning the present position are worth quoting: *Handsome* has become a comparatively strong and positive word. The three chief senses of today are "beautiful" "generous", and "considerable, ample" and this general character of positive strength may have brought about the fall of older, neutral or less positive senses.<sup>22</sup>

(2) Specialization in a social milieu

Michel Breal<sup>23</sup> drew attention to the fact that polysemy often arises through a kind of verbal shorthand. 'In every situation, in every trade or profession', he wrote, 'there is a certain idea which is so much present to one's mind, so clearly implied, that it seems unnecessary to state it when speaking'. For a lawyer, *action* will naturally mean 'legal action'; for the soldier it will mean a military operation, without any need for a qualifying epithet. In this way the same word may acquire a number of specialized senses only one of which will be applicable in a given milieu. *Paper* can refer not only to the material in general but to a variety of other things; legal or official documents; a newspaper; a set of examination questions; a communication read or sent to a learned society; in the plural it can also denote identity documents; certificates accompanying the resignation of an officer; documents showing the ownership, nationality of a ship, etc.<sup>24</sup>

(3) Figurative language.

Now, besides metaphor and other figures as an important factor in motivation and in emotive overtones; we have to consider yet another facet of the same device. A word can be given one or more figurative senses without losing its original meaning: *old* and *new* will live on side by side as long as there is no possibility of confusion between them. In this way a number of metaphors may 'radiate' from the central sense. The word 'eye', for example, may be applied to a wide range of objects reminiscent of the organ. The Short Oxford Dictionary lists the following metaphorical uses of this term:

1. An object resembling the eye in appearance, shape, or position: the centre of a flower, the leaf-bud of a potato, a spot on a peacock's tail, etc.
2. The opening through which the water of a fountain wells up.
3. A central mass; the brightest spot (of light)
4. The centre of revolution.
5. A hole or aperture in a needle or tool, etc.
6. A loop of metal, thread, cord, or rope.
7. In architecture: the centre of any part, as in 'the eye of a dome'.
8. In typography: the enclosed space in letters like *d*, *e* and *o*.<sup>25</sup>

There is the same kind of polysemy based on metaphor when we talk of the bed of

a river, the boot of a car, the cock of a gun, a saddle in the mountains, a sheet of paper, iron or water, or when, in the abstract sphere, we tackle a problem, come to grips with it, wrestle with it, get down to brass tacks, or find ourselves on the horns of a dilemma. This possibility of metaphorical transposition is fundamental to the working of language.<sup>26</sup>

(4) Homonyms reinterpreted.

Polysemy can also arise through a special form of popular etymology. When two words are identical in sound and the difference in meaning is not very great, we are apt to regard them as one word with two senses. Historically these are cases of homonymy since the two terms come from different sources; but the modern speaker, unaware of etymologies, will establish a link between them on purely psychological grounds.<sup>27</sup>

(5) Foreign influence.

Our last task is to take the opportunity of considering the various influence which have affected the development of vocabulary in the last three centuries, not only the adoption of foreign words, but also the use for new purposes of native material, and the consolidation or adaptation of the existing vocabulary.<sup>28</sup>

Two modern schemes of semantic change are in intention both casual and comprehensive and thus merit attention here: those of Gustaf Stern and Stephen Ullmann.

Stern's scheme, the earlier one, is put forward in his book *Meaning and Change of Meaning* together with a re-examination of the psychology of meaning. The seven classes which he distinguishes are profusely illustrated with examples for the history of the English vocabulary supported from time to time by parallels from other languages. It may be said here quite emphatically that, whatever may be thought of Stern's system of classification, his book remains a fascinating storehouse of specimens of semantic change in English and its recent reissue is to be applauded for this reason.<sup>29</sup>

It will be necessary here only to identify some of Stern's seven classes briefly and to cite some of the examples which he uses in illustration.

1 *Substitution* is a change due to an external, non-linguistic cause. For instance, alterations in the design of ships have brought about changes of meaning in the word *ship*. It once meant only a sailing-vessel; now it can mean a steam-driven vessel of quite a different appearance. To *travel*, as the etymology suggests, was to take part in a very different activity in the Middle Ages. The word is from OFr *travail*, *travailler* 'work, toil'; nowadays, travel suggests trains and airplanes with comfortable upholstered seats, rather than *travail*. Besides cases of factual change in the referent like these, the class also includes cases of change in knowledge of, or attitude towards, the referent: *the Stone Age*, *electricity* and *atom* have changed their sense with advance of knowledge, and scholasticism has fallen into disrepute, changing in the process the meaning of the word *scholasticism*.<sup>30</sup>

2 *Analogy*. The principle types of analogical sense-change are: analogy in flexional and derivational groups (the adjective *fast* has borrowed the sense 'quick' from the adverb of the same form, in which a continuous development of sense, from 'firmly, immovably' to 'quickly', is observable), correlative analogy (whereas the meaning of

*High* in *High Church* is a metaphorical extension of the ordinary meaning of the word *high*, the special meaning of *Low* in *Low Church*, which occurs later than its correlative expression, is arrived at not by a separate metaphorical process but by analogy with the other phrase) and phonetic associative interference, or popular etymology.<sup>31</sup>

3 *Ellipsis* has been defined by the UED as 'omission of word or words, usually such as will be inevitably supplied by the mind, or understood, in the construction of a sentence. The urge towards economy of effort often prompts us to code our information in a relatively brief form, where there is a high probability that the hearer will be able to supplement it from the context. Stern cites He went to his uncle's, It costs five and six, Sweet or dry, sir? etc..<sup>32</sup>

4 *Nomination* is change of meaning which results from the application of new names to things, whether the word so used is a new creation or an old word which has been deliberately transferred to a new significance. Stern cites *gas* as the classic case of neologism; it was invented by the Belgian chemist Jean Baptiste van Helmont (1577-1644). In modern times, too, it is in the spheres of science, invention and industry that the principle of inventing new words for new things has most often been followed: thus we have, from the nineteenth century, *helptomania*, *dinousaur*, *kenetic*, *entropy*, *metabolism*, *thrombin*, etc., and in the twentieth century *cyclotron*, *engram*, *nylon*, *polyvinyl*, *megaton*, and countless others. Van Helmont's *gas* was not completely original, for it was modelled on the Gk *chaos* 'chaos' (with Du q for Gk); similarly, the newly-coined scientific vocabulary of today often takes Latin or Greek words as its basis. More convincing, perhaps, as examples of vocabulary creation, would be imitative words like *gaga* (originally slang and have no certain etymology, such as *googly*, *jitters*, or *stooge*. In any case, this type of nomination does not involve change of meaning unless the new word is a compound of which one element has had a different use in the language, as is *airship*, for instance. Other, more regular, types of nomination are the use of proper names to designate things (*sandwich*, from an Earl of Sandwich), conscious metaphor, hyperbole, and all the figures of speech, in so far as they involve the deliberate giving of a new or altered name to something or somebody.<sup>33</sup>

5 *Transfer* is difficult to distinguish from certain types of nomination, for it also includes name-transfer—in other words, a kind of metaphor. Stern's distinction is based on the presence or absence of intention: whereas nominations are always deliberate, transfers are caused by the subliminal perception of similarities and are not the result of any conscious metaphorical intention. The word *brick*, for example, may be unreflectingly used of objects of brick-like shape, and similarly *ball*, *cone*, *cube*, *ladder*, etc..<sup>34</sup>

6 *Permutation*. This defined as 'a shift in the point of view concerning a detail of a total situation, or detail of a phrase referent, the same word being retained to denote it. Thus *boon* (ON *bon* OE *ben*) means originally 'prayer, petition, request'; later it changes to 'thing asked for, favour'. Stern conjectures that the change is due to a re-interpretation of whole utterances like 'He granted him his boon' (from 'he acceded to his request' to 'he gave him what he asked for'); in much the same way the appeal 'A boon, a boon!' may be at one and the same time an appeal for audience to a *request*

and an *appeal* for the thing which is about to be requested.<sup>35</sup>

7 *Adequation* is the change of meaning which results when the original reason for the choice of a particular name gets forgotten or disregarded and some new aspect of the object is seized on by the mind as the meaning of the word:

His chief example is *horn* which, in order of historical development of meaning, is (a) 'animal's horn', (b) 'animal's horn used for music', (c) 'musical instrument made from animal's horn', and finally, (d) 'instrument for producing a certain kind of sound'. In this example, the change from (a) to (b) is substitution, for it is non-linguistic in origin; the change from (b) to (c) constitutes adequation, or shift in the criteria of reference, and it is followed between (c) and (d) by a further example of substitution; in this phase *horn* is applied to instruments of a certain type made from materials other than animal horn. After metaphor and hyperbole, adequation takes the form of fading—the figure of speech gradually fades, or weakens, until the term becomes the straightforward literal designation of the referent.<sup>36</sup>

Professor Ullmann's scheme, which is expounded in *The Principles of Semantics*, is described as 'functional'; but though it is thus avowedly concerned with the immediate causes of semantic change rather than the results, it is in effect a compromise between the purely aetiological and the purely logico-rhetorical types.

The scheme is an analysis of sense-development on a fairly consistently psychological—or psycholinguistic—level. The two major aetiological categories are linguistic conservatism than that it is the tendency to preserve words in certain uses while the things to which they refer change. It is the second division that receives most attention.

A. Semantic changes due to *linguistic conservatism*

B. Semantic changes due to *linguistic innovation*

1. Transfers of names:

(a) Through *similarity* between the senses;

(b) Through *contiguity* between the senses.

2. Transfers of senses:

(a) Through *similarity* between the names;

(b) Through *contiguity* between the names.

3. *Composite* changes.<sup>37</sup>

Ullmann's rather special distinction between meaning and sense has to borne in mind at this point. He defines sense as 'the information which the name conveys to the hearer'; meaning is not synonymous with sense but is

a reciprocal and reversible relationship between name and sense: if one hears the word one will think of the thing, and if one thinks of the thing one will say the word. It is this reciprocal and reversible relationship between sound and sense which I propose to call the meaning of the word.

The main part of his scheme (B) is concerned with cases in which a given sense receives a new name, as in metaphor and metonymy, or in which a name is transferred to a different (though pre-existing) sense, as in folk-etymology and ellipsis. Metaphor and me-

tonymy show respectively the effect of similarity and contiguity between senses, and popular etymology and ellipsis the effect respectively of similarity and contiguity between names. This gives a symmetrical plan for B. 1-(b):

(a)	(b)
Similarity	Contiguity
1 between senses; Metaphor	between senses: → Name-Transfer Metonymy
2 between names: Popular Etymology	between names: → Sense-Transfer Ellipsis

Semantic changes being as complicated as they are, a great many composite changes of various kinds have to be accommodated in the third class of Section B. For instance, *belfry* is a combination of 2(a), name-similarity, and 1(b), sense-contiguity. There is nothing in the etymology to suggest *bell*, the earliest meaning being a 'defensive shelter' of the kind used by attackers to ward off missiles.<sup>38</sup>

What was needed for the emergence of semasiology, as the historical study of semantic change is sometimes called, was the acceptance of the thesis that lexical meaning rests not upon a natural bond between word and sense, nor even upon a convention or law, but upon something more indeterminate still—upon *custom*. Human customs change inadvertently, of their own accord, without the special intervention of any individual will; this is precisely what happens to the meanings of words in the course of time.<sup>39</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the further step was taken of systematizing the change on the basis of the logical processes involved. From this emerged a threefold classification into *Extension*, *Restriction*, and *Transfer*. *Extension* is the change which takes place when a word comes to designate a larger class than it did formerly (picture was formerly 'painting'; now it can mean any flat visual representation, including, for instance, a photographic print). *Restriction* is the opposite process (*meat* was formerly 'food' of any kind). *Transfer* includes the sudden leaps of metaphor and metonymy. This classification was made more symmetrical by R. Thomas.<sup>40</sup>

1. Changes within the same conceptual sphere
  - (a) Species pro genere
  - (b) Genus pro genere
2. Change through transfer to another conceptual sphere
  - (a) Through subjective correspondence (metaphor)
  - (b) Through objective correspondence (metonymy)

In the present century the emphasis has shifted from the systematic relating of earlier and later meanings to the psychological, sociological, and linguistic causes of change of meaning.<sup>41</sup>

Factors of many different kinds have been shown to contribute to semantic change. The one mentioned below are perhaps the most important of those which have operated below the level of conscious intention. It is now obvious that to explain change of meaning in depth we have to take into account much more than the speaker's or writer's

rhetoricall purpose, for many changes are the result of linguistic drift or social development.<sup>42</sup>

A number of changes of meaning are to be attributed ultimately to changes in the world at large. A large part of our language (that, especially, which relates to the material world) is classificatory. As the characteristics of things alter, for one reason or another, these classifications alter, too; very often in such cases the etymology of a word will testify to a meaning very different from that which it has today. *Manuscript* is no longer something necessarily 'written by hand' but is usually the author's original copy of the text of a printed books, etc., whether handwritten or typed (it retains more of its original sense in connection with medieval books, of course)<sup>43</sup>

New scientific discoveries, and the advance of knowledge generally, can also lead to change of meaning. As knowledge of the material world advances, definitions are more finely drawn; while we often go on using the old terminology its meaning changes, even in popular usage. For instance, *atom* is ultimately from Gk *atomos* 'indivisible'.

Next we may consider political vocabulary, which really had its origin in the sixteenth century, alongside, and perhaps as a result of, the development, particularly under Elizabeth, of a feeling of national unity, and the growth of ideas on political unity and independence, the new conception of nationality, and the equally new conception of patriotism to one's native country. These ideas were able to develop only after the earlier over-riding loyalty, to the Roman Catholic Church, had broken down as a result of the Reformation and also, so far as England is concerned, the later developments under the Tudors.<sup>44</sup>

At this time *nation* changed its meaning, which had previously suggested only difference of race, or type of people, and took on its present sense. The adjective *national* followed shortly after, and in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this new ideal of patriotism, of loyalty to one's own country, is suggested by the appearance of such words as *fatherland* and *mother-country*, *compatriot*, and *fellow-countryman*.<sup>45</sup>

Side by side with this new nationalist spirit there developed political consciousness, in our own sense of the word. In the sixteenth century we find *politics*, *political*, and *politician*; *parliamentary* is recorded about the same time. There is a significant development in the meaning of the first group; at first *politician* had the sense of 'statesman', but in the seventeenth century it almost always suggested intrigue and underhand scheming, and only gradually did it develop to its present meaning. *Legislator*, a loan from Latin, is also found in the seventeenth century. Our modern *Cabinet* is foreshadowed in the Cabinet Council of the early years of the reign of Charles 1, and *the Cabinet* is mentioned as such before the end of the reign.<sup>46</sup>

With the end of the eighteenth century we are in the period of the French Revolution; it is not surprising that such an important political event, taking place on our very doorstep, should make its influence felt in our vocabulary. *Aristocrat* and *democrat*, recorded first in 1789 and 1790 respectively, came into our language as a result of the Revolution, and they are still used by some people in a sense suggestive of the violent class-hatred then evident in France.<sup>47</sup>

Next we may consider the development of commerce from the seventeenth century to our own times as reflected in vocabulary. The introduction of foreign words for new objects and ideas encountered as a result of overseas trade: now we shall investigate the growth of what we may call a purely commercial vocabulary, the abstract terms connected with financial operations and the less picturesque side of trading. The establishment at that time of commerce as we know it today is clearly shown by the first appearance, in the seventeenth century, of many of the basic terms, and many more were added in the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century we find recorded for the first time, in our modern sense, *bank*, adopted from Italian, though it had been originally a Germanic word, the same word as developed into NE *bench*. In Italy it seems to have developed a special sense of 'moneychangers' bench, or table', and in that sense it was carried by the Lombards<sup>48</sup> into the languages of many European countries.

Another cause of change of meaning is the constant traffic in words which take place between various technical registers and the common core of the vocabulary, through which words lose the significance which they formerly had in specialized contexts and come to be used in more general senses. The technical language of the law, for instance, has given many words to common speech at one period or another. The *gist* of the matter, in law language, was 'the real ground or point of an action'.<sup>49</sup>

The reverse process, in which a general word is given a special meaning in a restricted context (e.g. *amplify*, *amplifier* in the language of radio), is just as common. This frequently happens in the case of names of materials: *glass* can mean 'lens', 'drinking-vessel', 'mirror', 'barometer', and in the plural 'spectacles' or 'binoculars'.<sup>50</sup>

Emotional feelings and social or moral attitudes contribute to change of meaning in two distinct ways. The factor of linguistic taboo, the reluctance to use certain words because of their unpleasant associations, leads to euphemism, i.e. the replacement of them by less highly charged, because less particular, forms of speech. This in itself does not constitute a change of meaning but it frequently happens that the substitute-term becomes more precise in reference to the unpleasant fact as it becomes more familiar in the euphemistic use; euphemism can therefore be regarded as a cause of semantic change. *Accident* has an unhappily precise meaning nowadays in connection with road traffic; its earliest meaning was general enough: 'chance occurrence'.<sup>51</sup>

A loose use of the term *pejoration* has sometimes led to the inclusion of these euphemistic specialization in a single class with words which exhibit some change of evaluative criterion—i.e. which have acquired some connotation of approval or disapproval, or exchanged one for the other. *Ringleader* was, in the seventeenth centuries, no more pejorative than leader is today (Bishop Hall refers to 'Christ, the ringleader of our salvation'); on the other hand, *enthusiasm* was common in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the sense of 'ill-regulated or misdirected religious emotion, *fanaticism*'.<sup>52</sup>

A particularly important cause of change of meaning in English has been the arrival of successive waves of loanwords principally from Latin.

We properly tackle an influence here which is generally admitted to have been one

of the strongest on our vocabulary and diction in the last few centuries, that of the English translations of the Bible, and in particular the Authorized Version of 1611, but to appreciate this influence fully we need to go back well beyond the seventeenth century, at least to the translations of *Tindale and Coverdale* in the early sixteenth century, and perhaps even to the still earlier *Wyclifite versions*. The main purpose in providing a Bible in the vernacular was to bring *the Scriptures* within the reach of the ordinary people. It would have been purposeless to use a learned vocabulary, full of Latinized words and the language of theology and philosophy. Words were needed which the people themselves would use to describe objects and emotions with which they were familiar. 'It will abound in concrete expressions, and need but few learned or recondite terms. The words should, if possible, exhibit their primitive meaning on their face, or, at least, suggest immediately a single central meaning which can be accepted as radical and primary. They must, in general, while racy and vernacular, be free from degrading or belittling associations, so that they may be equally suitable for the middle or ordinary style and for passages of any degree of elevation up the highest.'<sup>53</sup>

It is, therefore, obvious, that we shall not look here for the introduction of long learned words, though, of course, translation from another language is an obvious channel for introducing such words, and, as we shall see, some have been used; it is rather in the preservation of old words which might otherwise have been lost that we are to look for the influence of the Bible on our vocabulary. Words such as *apparel* and *raiment* for clothes, *damsel*, *quick*, in the sense of 'living', and *travail* all probably owe their survival to the Bible. It must be remembered that until comparatively recently all classes of our people were accustomed either to read or hear the words of the Bible very frequently—under the Commonwealth, laws were passed compelling its public reading—and the words so heard would not easily be lost from our vocabulary. Words read or heard thus regularly, whether loan-words or native terms, become so familiar that they are unlikely to be lost. But there are many words in the Bible used in an archaic sense; these words have been kept alive, sometimes, admittedly, only in a limited context, but if the present decline in Bible-reading continues it seems certain that such words will be largely lost to many people, for they will cease to be living vocabulary.

The vocabulary of the Bible is surprisingly small. According to Marsh there are about six thousand different words in the complete Bible, Old and New Testament. Marsh has also examined the proportion of native words, and, counting all the words and repetitions of the same word, he estimates that ninety-three per cent of the words in the Bible are from native sources.<sup>54</sup>

The influence of the Bible may be more easily demonstrated by the use of phrases and turns of expression than in single words, but even in the latter it is not lacking. The main influence is of a conservative nature, tending towards the retention of words familiar in earlier times, and perhaps retained now only through the influence of the Bible. It has also encouraged the use of concrete rather than abstract terms, and simple words rather than long learned words.<sup>55</sup>

One of the many ways in which a language can influence another is by changing the

meaning of an existing word. Sometimes the borrowed sense will simply supersede the old one; thus French *parlement*, which originally meant 'speaking' (from the verb *parler* 'to speak') and then came to denote a 'judicial court', acquired at a later date, under the influence of English *parliament*, its modern sense of 'legislative assembly', the only meaning in which it is at present used. In many cases, however, the old sense will survive alongside of the new, thus giving rise to a state of polysemy.<sup>56</sup>

'Semantic borrowing', as it is usually called, will be particularly frequent where there is intimate contact between two languages one of which serves as a model to another. This happened, for instance, in the early Christian Church where Hebrew exercised a powerful influence on Greek, and the latter on Latin. It is also happening at present in the speech of immigrants to the United States or, to take a more limited field, in the language of sports, which, in many countries, is saturated with Anglicisms. A few examples from each of these three very different linguistic situation will show how the process works.<sup>57</sup>

Many important concepts of the Christian faith owe their name to semantic borrowings from Hebrew or Greek. In the Bible, the Hebrew word *ml'k* 'messenger' was often used in the sense of 'angel'. Since there was no word for 'angel' in Greek, the translators of the Bible copied the polysemy of the Hebrew term by using the Greek 'messenger' in the meaning of 'angel'. From Greek the word passed into Latin and eventually became an international term: English *angel*, French *ange*, German *Engel*, Russian *angel*, Hungarian *angyal*, etc. Though the word looks Greek but we really owe it to Hebrew.<sup>58</sup>

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