Lexicography, semantics and lexicology in English historical linguistics

Nowadays it has become almost topical to state that linguistics is going through a period of re-discovery of the lexicon. In fact, over the last few decades many linguistic theories have gradually shifted from their original syntactically-oriented postulates towards more lexically-based ones. This lexical revival can be justified on the grounds of parallel developments not only in linguistic research, but also in disciplines such as psychology, philosophy or logic. One of the consequences of this rediscovery of the lexicon is the progressive integration of approaches and theories that had been sharply separated until now, such as semantic field theory and syntactic valency theory. This has allowed the development of new linguistic frameworks that advocate for the integration of paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects in a systematic and complementary way.

However, until very recently the developments just outlined have hardly influenced research in one linguistic area, which has remained the Cinderella of the story: I am referring to historical linguistics, a label I will use here in order to make reference to both the purely diachronic analysis of language and the synchronic reconstruction of historical states of language.

Only in the last few years has research in historical semantics, lexicology and lexicography begun to attract the attention of a growing number of researchers from different linguistic fields. This rediscovery of the lexicon in historical linguistics has greatly benefited from the development of a wide number of research tools, such as diachronic corpora, dictionaries and thesauri, which allow a more fine-grain analysis of the evolution of a given language. In the case of English historical linguistics, the progressive publication during the last decade of the first results of two major lexicographic projects, the ‘Dictionary of Old English Project’ and the ‘Historical
Lexicography, semantics and lexicology in HEL

Thesaurus of English Project’ has meant a rapid profusion of writing on the evolution of the English lexicon.

Moreover, these newly created tools have permitted a gradual application of different linguistic frameworks to the analysis of the vocabulary found in earlier periods of English. I am referring here to prototype theory, cognitive grammar, functional grammar, pragmatics, etc., where the methodological differences contribute to focus on the resolution of different aspects of the same problem, yielding increasingly more complete and delicate analyses of meaning and meaning change.

This volume comprises a number of significant contributions to the fields of English historical semantics, lexicology and lexicography. The papers collected in this volume offer a wide number of specific interests and approaches to the historical analysis of the English lexicon. Broadly, we can synthesise the different tendencies and main approaches of these contributions in the following way:

1. Dictionaries of early English

The arrangement I have chosen proceeds from the introductions of the work in progress in English historical lexicography. In the first paper in this section, “A preliminary design for a syntactic dictionary of Old English on semantic principles” (pp. 3-46), Francisco Cortés Rodríguez and Ricardo Maira Uson propose the guidelines for the elaboration of a syntactic dictionary of Old English verbs based on semantic domains. The methodology adopted for this dictionary project is based on the Functional Lexematic Model (FLM), elaborated by Leocadio Martín Mingorance between 1984 and 1990. The FLM integrates Coseriu’s Theory of Lexematics (Coseriu 1977) and Dik’s Functional Grammar (Dik 1989) with two main objectives: the specification of the semantic architecture of the lexicon of a given language and the
representation of knowledge based on the definitions found in standard dictionaries.

Since we have no direct access to meaning definitions, Cortés Rodríguez and Mairal Usón focus on the analysis of syntactic information in their application of the FLM principles to the creation of a dictionary of Old English verbs. By looking at the internal structure of a lexical subdomain, they consider that hierarchies could be reconstructed along the lines of a modified version of the Lexical Iconicity Principle. In the second part of this paper, the authors propose a complete analysis of the internal structure of the field of CHANGE, which includes both semantic and syntactic information on the verbs under this heading.

Following these same principles, Javier E. Díaz Vera proposes in his paper “The semantic architecture of the Old English verbal lexicon: A historical-lexicographical proposal” (pp. 47-77) a whole internal reconstruction of the verbal predicates that form the lexical subdomain of TOUCHING in Old English. Differently to the previous paper, this analysis takes into account the dictionary definitions found in standard dictionaries of Old English, such as Bosworth and Toller’s *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1898) and Hall’s *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1960), as well as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. By combining this information with morphosyntactic and etymological data, a reconstruction of the internal structure of this lexical subfield and its macronet connections with other domains is proposed, which aims at covering all the grammatical aspects of this section of the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary. The type of dictionary described here is thus to be seen not as a mere list of words and meanings, but rather as a grammar of Old English verbs.

A still different way of structuring a dictionary of Old English following the principles of the FLM is described by Pamela Faber and Juan Gabriel Vázquez González. In their paper “Adapting functional-lexematic methodology to the structuring of Old English verbs: A programmatic proposal” (pp. 78-108) they explore the paradigmatic organisation of the Old English lexicon. The authors
use FLM principles to structure the lexical domain of POSSESSION, and specifically adapt FLM methodology to the analysis of Old English. The paradigmatic structure of the verbs in this domain is informative in that it provides vital information about the evolution of the language through time. Furthermore, it underlines the importance of metaphor as a means of lexical creativity, and also encodes sociocultural relationships through its meaning parameters.

In “Turning the dictionary inside out: Some issues in the compilation of historical thesauri” (pp. 109-135), Christian Kay and Irené Wotherspoon reflect on their wide experience of creating historical thesauri from historical dictionaries. Their paper begins by describing the editorial procedures used in the Thesaurus of Old English and the Historical Thesaurus of English, taking the reader from the original paper slips to the interlinked semantic classifications and the database which ultimately result. Issues of semantics and lexicography are discussed in the context of historical linguistics. The authors conclude their contribution by making reference to what they have learned from these experiences, and especially on what an onomasiologically-organised word-book can tell us about the way in which the lexicon has developed over the history of English. They make reference both to the structure of particular semantic fields and to insights into individual meanings.

Finally, Jane Roberts and Louise Sylvester offer a preliminary sketch of their future thesaurus of Middle English. In their paper “Word studies on early English: Contexts for a thesaurus of Middle English” (136-159), they introduce this self-standing Middle English thesaurus, which is based on the use of data abstracted from the Glasgow Historical Thesaurus database and cross-refer to new evidence for Middle English vocabulary presented in the Middle English Dictionary. One of the main problems they have had to face during the compilation of their thesaurus has to do with the lack of a clear identification of early Middle English words. In their paper they discuss examples of new evidence for early Middle English, drawing their evidence in particular from the semantic fields of
Lexicography, semantics and lexicology in HEL

AGRICULTURE and EDUCATION. In doing so, they intend to examine the dip in representation of word senses for the early Middle English period by comparison with Old English and later Middle English and to consider links so far unexamined between the Old English vocabulary and the evidence for Old English to be found within the Oxford English Dictionary.

2. Early dictionaries of English

This part includes two papers devoted to the lexical analysis of some of the earliest examples of lexicographic practice in England. In his paper “The origin of 17th century canting terms” (pp. 163-196), Maurizio Gotti takes into consideration the main processes of word-formation followed in the formation of the canting terms reported in the main lexicographic works of the 17th century. Canting is understood here as the particular jargon spoken by the thieves and vagabonds, identified as an antilanguage typical of an antisociety, since its speakers’ activities were considered criminal by the rest of British society. In his analysis, Gotti uses a corpus of terms drawn from the dictionaries included in Richard Head’s The Canting Academy, chosen as a paradigmatic lexicographic work for this reasearch. According to his findings, some of the compilers of these early canting dictionaries and glossaries showed a high degree of metalinguistic awareness of these word-formation processes.

In “Early dictionaries of English and historical corpora: In search of hard words” (pp. 197-226), Anne McDermott addresses the question of how, by using currently available resources (such as electronic corpora and dictionaries), we can carry out research into the question of the provenance of ‘hard words’. Throughout this paper, McDermott questions the traditional view that most of these words were never an actual part of the language, but mere dictionary words. Her analysis of the earliest citations for these ‘hard words’ recorded in the different editions of the Oxford
English Dictionary shows that most of them have sources in earlier texts.

3. Semantic change and reconstruction

The third part of the volume focuses on a wide range of problems related with the reconstruction of meaning and meaning change. This section opens with the paper “The HORSE family: On the evolution of the field and its metaphorization process” (pp. 229-254), by Isabel de la Cruz Cabanillas and Cristina Tejedor Martínez. In order to get their data, the authors use such different tools as the Thesaurus of Old English, the Oxford English Dictionary on CD-ROM (1992), and some of the corpora included in the ICAME Collection of English Language Corpora (1999).

In their contribution, the authors propose a reconstruction of the field in the later periods of the English language up to the present moment. In doing so, they take into account not only the mere descriptive meaning of the terms, but also concentrate on the process of metaphorisation that some of the items underwent throughout their development. They discuss some of these uses in order to highlight the active role of metaphor in semantic change. According to their results, the original meanings have shifted to more metaphorical ones, which usually refer to human beings and denote an objectionable quality.

In “A semantic analysis of FEAR, GRIEF and ANGER words in Old English” (pp. 255-274), Małgorzata Fabiszak adopts a cognitive perspective in order to analyse the vocabulary related to these three emotions in Old English texts. By looking closely at the types of situations triggering them and at the individual and group reactions they produced, Fabiszak suggests that fear, grief and anger were deeply interwoven in the texture of the Anglo-Saxon social life; according to her investigation, whereas fear ensures loyalty to God or to a king, disloyalty arouses God’s or a king’s anger, which at its time would reinforce the fear. Furthermore, the
loss of a king would lead to the subject’s grief, as far as his death may be the cause of internal strife or aggression from other nations.

In a similar vein, in “The evolution of the lexical and conceptual field of anger in Old and Middle English” (pp. 275-299) Caroline Gevaert presents a reconstruction of this lexical field, based on the Oxford English Dictionary, the Historical Thesaurus of English and the Toronto Corpus. The author includes both words literally meaning ‘anger’ and metaphorical and metonymical expressions used to refer to this concept. Her analysis of the Old English material results in the reconstruction of a lexical field which shows hardly any direct Latin influence and is clearly dominated by the central metaphors swell (abylgan) and heat (hatheort). In Middle English, the lexical field is restructured, so that the central swell metaphor gradually disappears and the heat metaphor is reinterpreted, possibly under the influence of the humoral doctrine.

In her previous research, Päivi Koivisto-Alanko studied the process of semantic change of the prototypical structure of the noun wit and its near-synonyms (e.g. ingenuity, intellect, cleverness, understanding, mind, conscience) in late Middle English and early Modern English. In the present paper, “Prototypes in semantic change: A diachronic perspective on abstract nouns” (pp. 300-331), she intends to extend the diachronic perspective to Modern English in order to see whether the pattern of increasing subjectification in semantic change is still discernible in the field of cognition. Her findings indicate clearly that this semantic field has narrowed and that some of the changes studied earlier have been completed. However, as Koivisto-Alanko notes, the multiple senses of wit have not necessarily disappeared; they have been transferred to its former near-synonyms, some new words have entered the field and they appear to carry on the pattern of increasing subjectification in their semantic processes of change.

In the paper “A morphodynamic interpretation of synonymy and polysemy in Old English” (pp. 332-352), Manuela Romano
Pozo takes up some problems related to the semantic notions of synonymy and polysemy and their relevance to historical lexicography. Her analysis opens with a description of some of the similarities between the behaviour of natural chaotic-complex systems and meaning and between the morphodynamic and cognitive approaches to language and meaning. Thereafter, Romano Pozo proposes an interpretation of semantic fields as topographic landscapes in which different stable structures and catastrophic jumps determine their general behaviour or shape. In an attempt to apply these theoretical principles to a concrete semantic field, she proposes a description and representation of the overall structure of the semantic field of FRIENDSHIP in Old English, where a combination of semantic, cognitive and social factors interact in mutual interdependence. As the author affirms, this type of reconstruction (which includes both synchronic and diachronic aspects) has multiple application to lexicographic research of older periods of a language.

In “Using diachrony to predict and arrange the past: Giving and transferring landed property in Anglo-Saxon times” (pp. 353-371) Juan Gabriel Vázquez González affirms that history is encoded in language, because as society evolved, social relationships became increasingly complex. The lexical domain of POSSESSION is a treasure house of sociocultural information both of the present and the past. In his paper, the FLM is used to analyse the evolution of social relationships as represented by the giving and transferring of property in Anglo-Saxon England. For example, the onomasiological structure of the verbs of GIVING in Old English can be said to encode the dryhten/dryht bond, the Germanic comitatus already described by Tacitus. Although this relationship is representative of the prototypical schema of GIVING, the basic structuring parameter for this area of semantic space, other more complex relationships are also represented, which are extensions of this prototypical schema.
Lexicography, semantics and lexicology in HEL

A case in point in his research is the transfer of landed property between a king and his thegns. In this way, the onomasiological structure of the Old English lexicon is shown to reflect the evolution of social relationships in Anglo-Saxon times.

4. Lexical variation and change in the history of English

This part concentrates on the evolution of the English vocabulary, covering topics as diverse as neologism and word-loss, lexical borrowing and derivation, manuscript variation, etymological analysis and lexical structure.

Merja Black Stenroos offers in her contribution “Words for MAN in the transmission of Piers Plowman” (pp. 375-409) a pilot study inscribed within the ‘Middle English Grammar Project’, ongoing in Glasgow and Stavanger since 1997. In the present paper, she analyses a single lexical set, words for MAN, in the scribal transmission of Piers Plowman. Her aim is to study, with focus on a specific group of words, the behaviour of Middle English scribes with regard to lexis. Black confirms in her research two basic assumptions: that the usage of any given scribe with regard to lexis is systematic, rather than random, and that geographical, rather than textually conditioned, patterns in the distribution of words do occur and can be studied.

In “Diachronic word-formation and studying changes in productivity over time: Theoretical and methodological considerations” (pp. 410-437), Claire Cowie and Christianne Dalton-Puffer address the general question of how the dynamics of word-formation can be dealt with from a historical perspective. In order to do so, they examine the ways in which morphological productivity is amenable to study in a historical context from a mainly methodological perspective. By using empirical methods, the authors trace various processes of change in word-formation patterns undergone by English in different historical periods,
covering the whole history of the language. They note that morphological productivity is not only a theoretical concept but a measurable property of word-formation rules, and thus they establish a theoretical basis for viewing productivity from a diachronic perspective.

Eulalia Fernandez Sanchez proposes in “Cognitive etymological search for lexical traces of conceptual mappings: Analysis of the lexical-conceptual domain of the verbs of POSSESSION” (pp. 438-463) a further application of the previously mentioned FLM to the analysis of lexical evolution. On this occasion, and with the main purpose of stressing the relevance of diachronic analysis to the cognitivist study of language, in particular, and to the comprehension and understanding of our cognitive system, in general, Fernández Sánchez tries to prove the existence of different levels of lexical categorisation through the etymological analysis of the linguistic categories that constitute the lexical domain of the verbs of POSSESSION.

Manfred Markus discusses in “The Innsbruck Prose Corpus: Its concept and usability in Middle English lexicology” (pp. 464-483) on some possible applications of historical corpora (with special interest on the Innsbruck Prose Corpus, a collection of 129 unabridged Middle English prose texts from 1150 to 1500) to lexical studies. According to Markus, corpus-based research on Middle English lexis is progressively focusing on the analysis of individual words, often with an interest in their syntax. Normalised and tagged texts are especially useful for this type of research, and the Innsbruck Prose Corpus project will try to contribute to the achievement of that aim. The author offers several illustrative examples of words linked to various linguistic subsections with the following conclusions: more research is needed not only on Middle English syntax (particularly on the syntax of function words), but also on the syntax and semantics of fixed expressions (above all of idiomatic phrases) and on their pragmatic and stylistic features.
Michiko Ogura’s contribution “Words of EMOTION in Old and Middle English” (pp. 484-499) focuses on different processes of lexical supersession that affected the Old English vocabulary of emotions after the Norman Conquest. In order to do so, the author analyses various Old and Middle English translations of the Gospels, comparing them to the Wicliffite Bible. In the second part of the paper, Ogura concentrates on the use of native and loanwords in some late Old and early Middle English alliterative poems, with special attention to *Apollonius of Tyre*, *King Horn*, *Floris* and *Blauncheflur*, and *Havelok* and *Sir Orfeo*. These texts illustrate clearly the supersession and coexistence of words of EMOTION throughout the medieval period. Lexical replacement becomes more drastic after 1300 when changes in verse forms and literary genre affect the contexts in which words of EMOTION were used. Thus, although many Old French and Old Norse loanwords were already in use in the thirteenth century, they coexisted with native words of emotion for several decades, contributing to increase the degree of lexical variety that characterises English medieval literature.

In his contribution “‘Touched by an alien tongue’: Studying lexical borrowings in the earliest Middle English” (pp. 500-521), Janne Skaffari discusses a number of issues relating to corpus-based studies of vocabulary and lexical borrowing, with special reference to early Middle English. This research derives from a quantitative examination of the French, Scandinavian, and Latin loanwords in the first Middle English subsection of the Helsinki Corpus. One of the central questions addressed here has to do with the capacity of synchronic material to reveal a diachronic perspective on the transitional period between late Old and Middle English.
5. The interface between semantics, syntax and pragmatics

Diana M. Lewis examines in “Rhetorical factors in lexical-semantic change: The case of at least” (pp. 525-538) the importance of rhetorical purpose and rhetorical context in lexical semantic change, to show how at least has developed since Middle English from a purely scalar qualifier into a polysemous expression serving epistemic and evaluative functions in addition to the original representational function. Her quantitative data on at least from Middle English to the present show that the co-occurrence of the expression with particular rhetorical patterns of contrast generates implicatures that become conventionalised, leading to the new polysemies. Moreover, at least acquires an information structuring role by introducing rhetorical satellites, i.e. marking its host unit as informationally subordinate to the adjacent, foregrounded unit(s).

Silvia Molina Plaza studies in her paper “Modal change: A corpus study from 1500 to 1710 compared to current usage” (pp. 539-562) modal change in early Modern English and compares it to modality in Present-Day English, using as her data a corpus of private letters from the Helsinki Corpus. The letters come from various sources and belong to private, informal registers. The modal tokens in her corpus illustrate the diachronic process of grammaticalisation where lexical verbs have progressively acquired grammatical values as modal verbs.

Anna Poch and Isabel Verdaguer’s contribution “The rise of new meanings: A historical journey through English ways of looking at” (pp. 563-571) includes a detailed analysis of how the English language has lexicalised a great number of verbs indicating manner of, especially in the field of visual perception. Troponyms of look at, such as stare, peep, gaze or gape among others, are studied in their paper. A preliminary diachronic survey shows that only some of the above-mentioned manner-of-looking-at verbs were present in the Old English vocabulary, since most of them entered the English lexicon in the Middle and Modern English period. Their
origin is sometimes obscure, but it is noteworthy that their first documented sense is often not related to visual perception. The authors analyse the semantic evolution of these verbs from a cognitive perspective in order to show how the present state has been reached, highlighting the diverse semantic domains from which these verbs originate, and what factors have motivated the transfer of their senses from one domain to another.

Junichi Toyota’s contribution “Lexical analysis of Middle English passive constructions” (pp. 572-610) consists of a detailed corpus-based study of the lexical system of the passive voice in Middle English. Toyota focuses on the lexical influence on some functions of the passive, especially stativisation. In doing so, he tries to disambiguate several types of stative and non-stative construction included under the heading passive: (i) verbal passive, (ii) adjectival passive and (iii) resultative, finding some lexical link to these distinctions. As the author states, these three different constructions seem to possess varying degrees of characteristics of the passive: thus, whereas verbal passive are considered wholly passive, adjectival passive are rather less passive, resultative construction representing an intermediate level between the two.

The result is a collective volume which represents the work of a wide range of scholars in different fields of English Historical Linguistics nowadays, with special attention to those linguistic branches that focus on the word as the basic unit of description.

CIUDAD REAL, JANUARY 2002

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