

## Circling the square: On Greimas's semiotics\*

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The title of the book under review might suggest to some readers that it is a translation of the collection of essays Greimas published under the title *Du sens*, in 1970. However, the fourteen essays that make up this book have been drawn from three different collections by Greimas. Only four of the essays come from *Du sens*; six come from *Du sens II* (1983); and the balance from *Sémiotique et sciences sociales* (1976).

In addition to these fourteen essays, the book contains a Foreword by Fredric Jameson, a Translators' Note, and an Introduction by the senior translator, Paul Perron. There is also a brief index and four pages of notes at the end of the book; a page and a half of these are notes to the preface and introduction. Some of the notes to Greimas's essays are interpolations by the translators.

If Greimas himself had any hand in the selection of essays, this fact is nowhere indicated; presumably, Perron is primarily responsible for the selection. In discussing this book, I will first consider it as a presentation of Greimas's work, rather than as a work by Greimas himself. This will entail comments on such matters as the introductory material, the choice of essays to be translated, and the quality of the translation. One major issue that derives from a critique of the translation concerns the notion of signification. I will conclude with a discussion of Greimas's conception of semiotics, in which his notion of the 'semiotic square' plays a central role.

Let us turn first to a consideration of the essays chosen to be included in *On Meaning*. In their note, the translators state that 'our task was to make a selection of Professor Greimas's writing accessible to anglophone readers for whom the original French is too difficult' (p. xxiii). People who are monolingual in English would find any French 'too difficult'. Due to the technical nature of Greimas's writings, however, the ability to read

\* Algirdas Julien Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (= *Theory and History of Literature* 38), trans. by Paul J. Perron and Frank H. Collins. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

French is no guarantee of being able to understand Greimas.

What I am suggesting is that there are two distinct goals — that of translating Greimas into English and that of making a presentation of Greimas's essays that would be understandable to an audience with no previous exposure to his work. If none of Greimas's work had ever previously been translated into English, then any selection of essays would serve both goals, to a certain degree.

In his Introduction, Perron does make reference to English translations of two of Greimas's books (*Structural Semantics* and *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*). However, I do not find any references to several articles by Greimas that have appeared in English; the earliest that I am aware of is Greimas (1967b).

Among these previously translated essays are some that would serve as better introductions to a general audience than those included in the book under review. One in particular (Greimas 1971b) provides a brief, relatively non-technical overview of Greimas's work in narrative theory. Another essay (Greimas 1971a) is much more technical, but it has the virtue of offering a detailed analysis of a narrative text: the Bororo myth Lévi-Strauss chose as his point of departure in *The Raw and the Cooked*. However, inclusion of previously translated material would mean that the book could not be promoted as offering selections available for the first time in English. (Actually, the book already includes two articles that have previously appeared in English, but they do appear here in new translations.)

Even if we restrict attention to essays not previously translated into English, the selections can be criticized as being too heavily weighted toward the theoretical. Analyses of specific texts are sorely lacking. Among the possibilities are Greimas (1967a), which analyzes a number of variants of a Lithuanian folktale; and two articles included in *Du sens II*: 'Des accidents dans les sciences dites humaines', the analysis of the preface to a book by Dumézil; and 'La soupe au pistou ou la construction d'un objet de valeur', an analysis of an entry in a French cookbook. The latter two essays illustrate Greimas's attempt to extend his analytic approach to expository discourse.

What I judge to be deficiencies in the choice of essays could have been partially compensated for — the translators could have included a complete bibliography of those of Greimas's writings that have appeared in English, as well as discussions in English of Greimas's work, and so on. There is no bibliography at all in this book — an unfortunate reflection of Greimas's own practice.

Perron begins his Introduction by referring the reader to a couple of works that not only provide a complete bibliography of Greimas's

writings, but also offer an overview of his theories and sketch their intellectual background. Unfortunately, these works are in French — hence inaccessible to the ‘anglophone readers’ who are the intended audience for the book! (I have not seen these works, so I cannot comment on their adequacy.) To a large extent, Perron limits himself to summarizing the fourteen essays. Furthermore, this is often a matter not of putting things in his own words, but of presenting short quotes from Greimas or from Greimas and Courtés’s *Semiotics and Language*. Quoting Greimas to explicate Greimas for the first-time reader is not an ideal strategy.

When Perron does summarize Greimas in his own words, the results sometimes come out garbled. For example, in discussing Greimas’s work on narrative grammar, Perron states that ‘after Propp’s thirty-one functions ... were redefined [by Greimas] in terms of a limited number of actants, it then became possible to conceive of a principle of organization underlying whole classes of narratives’ (p. xxvii). Propp (1968) analyzed a corpus of Russian fairy tales in terms of both a sequence of functions and a system of seven narrative roles (such as villain, hero, etc.). Greimas (1966), in turn, subjected each aspect of Propp’s work to reanalysis: the chapter ‘A la recherche des modèles de transformation’ is devoted to a logical reduction of Propp’s inventory of functions; the chapter ‘Réflexions sur les modèles actantiels’ is devoted to a reanalysis of Propp’s inventory of narrative roles.

Jameson’s preface is less tied to the particular essays translated, but his remarks are no more satisfactory than Perron’s. Based on his mode of writing, I would infer that Jameson is a literature professor. He categorizes his remarks as those of an interested outsider, suggesting that ‘we outsiders or interlopers — who resist the invitation to join the discipline and to “become semioticians”, ... — should also feel free to *bricolate* all this, that is, in plainer language, simply to *steal* the pieces that interest or fascinate us, and to carry off our fragmentary booty to our intellectual caves’ (p. viii).

Jameson refers to Greimas’s essays as ‘bristling with scientificity’ (p. vi). Neither *scientificity* nor the term *scientifistic*, which he uses on the following page, occurs in any dictionary I consulted, including the unabridged *Webster’s Third*. The term seems to connote a disparagement of science. However, to disparage science is to disparage Greimas’s own vision of semiotics (see Sebeok 1986: 376).

Jameson suggests that

we bracket the whole question of science and scientificity in Greimas, and think of the body of texts that follow ... as ... a theoretical private language among many others resonating through the airspace of the contemporary public sphere. Let us

therefore initially think of the 'concepts' of Greimassian semiotics rather as a ... fresh and idiosyncratic, arbitrary, violent, often unlovely renaming of a whole space and collection of objects already familiar to us under other names and in different installations or perspectives: actants, narrative contracts, narrative programs, isotopies. ... (p. viii)

If in fact Greimas merely offers new bottles for old wine, why would anyone be interested in his work?

Jameson devotes about half of his Preface to a discussion of Greimas's 'semiotic square' and his own application of it to an analysis of a nonfiction book. One indicator of Jameson's reliability as a guide to this aspect of Greimas's work can be gained by this remark: 'A final warning must be directed to the peculiar nature of the fourth term, the negation of the negation:  $\bar{s}_2$ . This must be ... the place of novelty and of paradoxical emergence: It is always the most critical position and the one that remains open or empty for the longest time ...' (p. xvi).

We will consider the semiotic square later, but we can point out a couple of problems here with Jameson's remarks. First, there is his characterization of  $\bar{s}_2$ , as 'the negation of the negation'. Actually, what  $\bar{s}_2$  represents is the contradictory of  $s_2$ . If  $\bar{s}_2$  is regarded as a negation, then the negation of the negation would be  $s_2$ . As for this being referred to as the 'fourth term', the semiotic square is an achronic structure. Greimas does note that it can be given a dynamic interpretation — the relations can be interpreted as operations, and these operations are oriented. But the oriented operations can begin with any one of the four terms (see pp. 68–69). In other words, there is no fixed 'fourth term'.

I have up to this point touched on a number of factors that, to my mind, seriously compromise the usefulness of this book as an introduction to Greimas's work. These deficiencies are compounded by deficiencies in the translation. It had not been my initial intent to be concerned with the adequacy of the translation. But problems intruded themselves, and this led me to compare the translator's versions of a couple of essays with the French originals. The problems encountered are assumed to be a representative sample.

I should emphasize at this point that I claim no expertise in the French language. However, my concern is with translation *into* English, my native language. At a couple of points when I thought the French had been mistranslated, it proved to be an accurate translation, but the English was so awkward that I had misread it.

Here are a couple of examples of infelicities in English that are primarily stylistic in nature. The first is from the essay 'The interaction of semiotic constraints'. In this particular case, I do not have the French

original; comparison is made to an earlier English translation (Greimas and Rastier 1968).

*On Meaning* (p. 50): The *terms* of the model: Starting from each of the four terms, by means of the two operations — the *contradictory* and the *contrary* — we can obtain the others.

Greimas and Rastier (1968: 89): The *terms* of the model: using each of the four terms as point of departure, one can obtain the three others by the two operations: by taking the contradictory and by taking the contrary.

It may be the case that the translation in *On Meaning* is more literal, but the earlier translation reads better (though it is not ideal). I should point out that in some instances the earlier translation is definitely less satisfactory than the new one.

Here is a second example where the problem is 'stylistic' in a loose sense. This example comes from 'Elements of a narrative grammar', which is compared with the French original (Greimas 1969).

*On Meaning* (p. 70): The term *grammatical level* begs definition.

Greimas (1969: 79) Le terme de *niveau grammatical* demande d'abord à être définie.

The translators' choice of *beg* is infelicitous, in that it can have the meaning 'to evade, sidestep'.

Let us turn to another type of translation infelicity — one that is neither a matter of style or English usage, nor a clearcut instance of mistranslation. Consider the following passage from the essay 'On anger: A lexical semantic study':

If we take a dictionary definition for *anger* (for convenience's sake we will constantly refer to the *Petit Robert*)

'a violent *discontent* accompanied by aggressiveness;'  
we see that. ... (p. 149)

A comparison with the original verifies that Greimas (1983: 226) is in fact examining not the English word *anger* but the French word *colère*; and the definition he cites is a definition from a French dictionary. The translators should have said, 'If we take a dictionary definition for the French word *colère* "anger" ...'. This may appear to be carping, but Greimas subscribes to the view that different languages carve up reality in different ways, and there is usually no exact correspondence between

terms in different languages that nominally are treated as equivalent in bilingual dictionaries.

The preceding example is perhaps a subtle instance of some of the pitfalls associated with translating technical material. The translators are aware of the more obvious problems posed by technical terms. They claim to have solved this problem 'by adopting as our authority, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary*. In this we were steadfastly consistent' (p. xxiii). I have not seen this work, either in the French or in the English translation; but Segre (1984: 269), in his review of the English translation, suggests that the results are often less than ideal.

An instance in which the translators fail to be 'steadfastly consistent' involves the term *constitutional model*. The translators use this term in the third essay, 'The interaction of semiotic constraints'. However, in the next essay, 'Elements of a narrative grammar', they refer to the *constitutive model* (see, for instance, p. 66). However, in both instances the French term is *le modèle constitutionnel* (see, for instance, Greimas 1969: 74).

There are also instances where the translators do not use standard terminology. For example, in a discussion of Russian fairy tales analyzed by Propp, Greimas (1969: 87) refers to *le traître*. The translators use the term *traitor* (p. 78); however, the standard term is *villain*.

Let us turn now to a consideration of some examples that go beyond mere infelicities. There are numerous instances in which Greimas's meaning is not properly conveyed. The translators' use of italics for emphasis does not always correspond to the French original. In some cases, the translators use italics where none occur in the original; in other cases, they omit italics. The net result can be a misrepresentation of authorial intent. Consider the following example.

*On Meaning* (p. 71): If, therefore, one of the basic concepts of *deep* grammar is the *syntactic* operation, at the *surface* level it will correspond to syntactic *doing*.

Greimas (1969: 79): Si, par conséquent, l'un des concepts de base de la grammaire fondamentale est celui d'*opération* syntaxique, il correspondra, au niveau superficiel, au *faire* syntaxique.

Greimas intends to emphasize the contrast between the (logical) notion of 'operation' and the (anthropomorphic) notion of 'doing'.

Here are some clear-cut examples of mistranslation *per se*, where the author's meaning is not properly conveyed.

*On Meaning* (p. 71): ... the constitutive elements of the F and A utterances are isotopes.

Greimas (1969: 80): ... les éléments constitutifs de l'énoncé, F et A, sont isotopes.

Greimas had, just before this quotation, given the form of a basic narrative utterance as  $NU = F(A)$ . Clearly, what he is saying in the above quote is that 'the constituent elements of the utterance, F and A, are isotopes'. The expression *F and A* is in apposition to *the constituent elements of the utterance*.

Here is an example of a mistranslation due to the translators' lack of understanding of Greimas's use of a linguistic model.

*On Meaning* (p. 70): Once we have a deep grammar, it should be possible to identify levels of grammar that are even 'deeper' and that, by making the categories we use more specific or by transcribing them in a more complex way, would get progressively closer to grammar as it is manifested in natural languages.

Greimas (1969: 78): En possession d'une grammaire fondamentale il serait possible d'imaginer des niveaux de grammaire plus bas qui, en spécifiant davantage les catégories utilisées ou en les transcrivent de manière plus complexe, l'approcheraient progressivement de la grammaire telle qu'elle est manifestée, par exemple, dans les langues naturelles.

The above passage should have referred to *lower* levels of grammar, not *deeper* levels. In the conception of deep structure and surface structure in linguistics, deep structure is spatially identified with high, and surface structure with low.

Another example of what might appear to be a mistranslation is most likely a simple typographical error: 'The operator thus established and provided with a being-able-to-do or knowing-how-to-do is not able to accomplish the performance for which it has just been created' (p. 79). The word *not* should be replaced by *now* (cf. Greimas 1969: 88).

Incidentally, I encountered several typographical mistakes, some of these involving the diagrams. For example, the diagram of the constitutional model, on p. 49, has  $\bar{s}_1$  and  $\bar{s}_2$  reversed. The diagram on p. 66 has the arrows representing presupposition misplaced. The diagram should show a relation of presupposition between  $s_1$  and  $\bar{s}_2$ , and between  $s_2$  and  $\bar{s}_1$ .

As a cautionary note, I should point out that I do not have a copy of *Du sens*, the source apparently used by the translators. It is conceivable that the mistakes occur in that printing of the essays. One instance of a typographical error in *On Meaning* (p. 169: 'the restriction according to which  $\bar{S}_2 = \bar{S}_1$ , and  $\bar{S}_1 = S_2$ ') also occurs in *Du sens II* (Greimas 1983: 120). This should read '...  $\bar{S}_2 = S_1$  ...'.

At this point I would like to give extensive attention to a matter that

has its origin in a question of translation, but which will open the way to the discussion of a substantive issue. The question concerns how the French words *signification* and *sens*, which recur repeatedly in Greimas's writings, should be translated into English. Note that the term *sens* is especially prominent in that it figures in the title of two of Greimas's books, *Du sens* and *Du sens II*.

A standard French–English dictionary, such as the *Collins–Robert*, gives as equivalents to French *signification* the English words ‘meaning’ and ‘signification’. Equivalents to French *sens* include ‘sense’ and ‘meaning’. The translators of *On Meaning* seem to have been largely — but not totally — consistent in translating French *signification* as English *signification*, and French *sens* as English *meaning*.

However, there is no uniform practice among translators of Greimas. Consider Greimas's expression *la structure élémentaire de la signification*. One translator renders this as ‘the elementary structure of meaning’ (Greimas and Rastier 1968: 87). Perron and Collins use the expression ‘the elementary structure of signification’ (p. 49).

Perron and Collins apparently regard the distinction between ‘meaning’ (*sens*) and ‘signification’ (*signification*) as an important aspect of Greimas's semiotics. On the back cover of *On Meaning*, in a brief summary of the book's contents, it is stated that ‘from the outset, Greimassian semiotics seeks to answer these questions: What are the conditions for the production of meaning, and how can the transformation of meaning into signification be described?’

I am not aware of any explicit, extended discussion by Greimas of the terms *sens* and *signification*, nor of any detailed rationale for distinguishing them. In the index to *On Meaning*, there is one entry for ‘meaning’ *per se*, with one page number given. There are also entries for ‘Meaning, discourse on’ and ‘Meaning, generation of’, with reference to a particular section of the essay ‘Elements of a narrative grammar’. There is one entry for ‘Signification, elementary structure of’, with a reference to the same section of the ‘Narrative grammar’ essay.

It so happens that this particular essay is the only context in which I can find Greimas drawing a distinction between *sens* and *signification* — which he does almost as an afterthought. Let me quote the relevant passage from *On Meaning* (p. 64). I will put in square brackets the terms used by Greimas (1969: 72) whose proper translation is in question:

This in turn allows us to attain simultaneously the two goals of meaning [*le sens*] when it becomes manifested: to appear as *articulated meaning* [*sens articulé*], that is, as signification [*signification*], and as *discourse on meaning* [*le sens*], that is, as a great paraphrase that in its own way develops all earlier [*antérieures*] articulations of meaning [*du sens*].



This passage suggests that, for Greimas, *signification* means 'meaning', but meaning that can be characterized as 'articulated'. (In the sentence immediately following the quoted passage, Perron and Collins actually translate *signification* as 'meaning'.) Obviously, the passage needs to be placed in the wider context of Greimas's writings — a task to which we will turn shortly.

As a preliminary, let us briefly explore some scholars' use of the term *signification*, both in English and in French. We will begin by reviewing the basic meanings of the English terms 'meaning', 'sense', and 'signification', as specified in various dictionaries. It goes without saying that dictionary definitions do not necessarily correspond to technical definitions, but the acceptations of ordinary words are part of the baggage they bring to any discussion in which they are used in a technical sense.

The 1976 college edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* indicates that all three terms — 'meaning', 'sense', and 'signification' — are synonyms. The term 'meaning' is said to be nonspecific, thus overlapping with the other two. The term 'sense' can be used specifically to denote a particular meaning — one of a group of meanings conveyed by a single word. The term 'signification' is said to apply to 'accepted or established meaning, directly conveyed' — a somewhat cryptic remark.

The main entry for 'signification' recognizes two senses: (1) 'the intended meaning; sense', and (2) 'the act of signifying'. The second sense reminds us that 'signification' is a deverbal noun, derived from the verb 'signify'. *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* elaborates upon the sense 'act of signifying' by adding 'a making known (as a choice, intent, decision) by signs or other means'. Thus, from a sentence such as 'They signified their assent by raising their right hands' we could derive the phrase 'the signification of assent'.

The preceding example shows that, in English at least, the notion of signification is not limited to verbal language. This may explain why it is that the term 'signification' often does not appear in the index of books on language and semantics.

One book that contains a discussion of signification is Lyons's (1977) major survey of the field of semantics. Toward the beginning of Chapter 4, entitled 'Semiotics', Lyons states that 'signification is commonly described as a triadic relation, which may be further analyzed into three dyadic relations; two basic and one derivative' (1977: 96). Signification in this sense is usually represented in the form of a triangle (see Figure 1). Lyons notes that various terms are used for the elements entering into this triadic relation. He proposes calling A, *sign*; B, *concept*; and C, *signification*. The fact that there is no direct relation between a sign and its

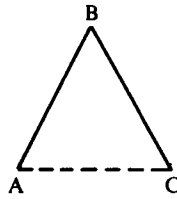


Figure 1

significatum is indicated by the dotted line between A and C. The relation between A and C is mediated by B, a concept.

A few pages later, Lyons notes,

As we have already seen, in one traditional analysis of signification, concepts mediate between words and objects ... . Let us now introduce the term signification for the mediating concept, so that we can say that what a word signifies directly is its signification and what it signifies indirectly is its significatum. (1977: 110).

In the course of a few pages, 'signification' has gone from referring to a triadic relation to referring to one of the elements in such a relation.

One scholar for whom the notion of signification plays a central role is Charles Morris. Consider his characterization of semiosis (sign process)

as a five-term relation —  $v w x y z$  — in which  $v$  sets up in  $w$  the disposition to react in a certain kind of way,  $x$ , to a certain kind of object,  $y$  (not then acting as a stimulus), under certain conditions,  $z$ . The  $v$ 's, in the cases where this relation obtains, are *signs*, the  $w$ 's are *interpreters*, the  $x$ 's are *interpretants*, the  $y$ 's are *significations*, and the  $z$ 's are the *contexts* in which the signs occur. (Morris 1964: 2)

Thus, the signification of a sign is its referent in 'reality'.

Morris (1964: 9) explicitly draws a distinction between signification and meaning; he states that 'the "meaning" of a sign is *both* its signification and its interpretant, and neither alone'.

Our very brief sampling of how 'signification' is used in English shows no total uniformity; but basically the term — at least in its technical sense — often seems tied up with the idea that a sign 'signifies' or 'stands for' something in the external world. This seems to be the way Lyons ultimately views the notion. He states that 'as long as we restrict our attention to objects like tables, it might seem reasonable to say that the

words which are used to refer to them are signs ... . Once we extend the notion of signification to cover all lexemes, however, we run the risk of trivializing it completely' (1977: 114).

To repeat the obvious, how the term 'signification' is used in English has no bearing on how Greimas uses the French term *signification*. However, the acceptance of English 'signification' can color readers' interpretation of Greimas when he is translated into English. Let us turn now to the task of trying to establish the technical sense of French *signification* in Greimas's writings.

Since Greimas's work can be situated in the post-Saussurean structural tradition, a reasonable point of departure is the *Cours de linguistique générale* (Saussure 1965). The index for the *Cours* has only one entry for the term *signification*, with reference to section 2 of chapter IV, 'La valeur linguistique'. There Saussure is at pains to distinguish the concept of *valeur* ('value') from that of *signification*:

Quand on parle de la valeur d'un mot, on pense généralement et avant tout à la propriété qu'il a de représenter une idée, et c'est là en effet un des aspects de la valeur linguistique. Mais s'il en est ainsi, en quoi cette valeur diffère-t-elle de ce qu'on appelle la *signification*? ... Prenons d'abord la *signification* telle qu'on se la représente et telle que nous l'avons figurée p. 99. Elle n'est, comme l'indiquent les flèches de la figure, que la contre-partie de l'image auditive. (Saussure 1965: 158)

The figure to which Saussure refers is presented here as Figure 2. Earlier, Saussure proposed replacing the term *concept* with the term *signifié*, and the term *image acoustique* with *signifiant*. Thus, when Saussure says that signification is the counterpart of the acoustic image, he is in effect equating the terms *signifié* and *signification*. There is no doubt about this, for on the very next page Saussure says that 'd'un côté, le concept nous apparaît comme la contre-partie de l'image auditive dans l'intérieur du

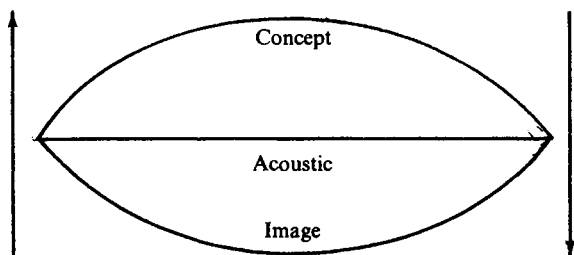


Figure 2

signe ...'. Wells (1958: 4), in a discussion of Saussure, also notes that *le signifié* is sometimes called *la signification*. In such cases, French *signification* would be appropriately translated as English 'meaning' (one sense of which is 'that which is signified by something').

If one wanted to infer what *signification* means for Saussure if it is not identified with *le signifié*, one would postulate that it refers to the relation between *signifiant* and *signifié*. When Saussure (1965: 162) says '*on voit des lors l'interprétation réelle du schéma du signe. Ainsi ... veut dire qu'en français un concept "juger" est uni à l'image acoustique juger; en un mot il symbolise la signification*', he interpolates between *ainsi* and *veut dire* a diagram showing the concept 'juger' linked to the acoustic image *juger*. It would appear that the pronoun *il*, in '*il symbolise la signification*', has as antecedent '*le schéma du signe*'. The pair of arrows in the diagram indicates a reciprocal relationship between *signifié* and *signifiant*.

Let us now consider how Stephen Ullmann uses the French terms *signification* and *sens*. Ullmann writes in both French and English, so it is possible to compare his usage in the two languages without the potentially distorting intervention of a translator.

For information about Ullmann's terminology in French, I have drawn upon Schogt (1976: 29–30), who quotes the following passage from Ullmann's *Précis de sémantique française*:

Le signe linguistique se trouvera donc restreint à deux termes, tous deux d'ordre psychique: le nom [=Saussure's *signifiant*] et le sens [=Saussure's *signifié*], ainsi qu'au lien qui les unit l'un à l'autre. Il s'agit, on vient de le voir, d'un rapport d'évocation réciproque: le nom évoque le sens et le sens évoque le nom ... Ce rapport réciproque et réversible est le fondamental de toute sémantique: nous l'appellerons la *signification* du mot. Parmi les innombrables définitions proposées pour ce terme, nous retiendrons donc celle-ci: *la signification est le rapport d'évocation réciproque qui unit le nom et le sens ...*. La terminologie proposée à le double avantage d'être simple et d'écarter la synonymie facheuse entre *sens* et *signification*.

Schogt (1976: 30) comments that it is far from certain that Ullmann has succeeded in satisfactorily eliminating the confusion between *sens* and *signification*.

If we turn to Ullmann's paper 'The concept of meaning in linguistics', we find a discussion that basically overlaps the passage just quoted from his *Précis de sémantique française*. In the English text, Ullmann (1964: 18–19) speaks of a reciprocal and reversible relation between name and sense; he proposes further that

It is this reciprocal and reversible relationship which we might call the 'meaning' of

the word, though it is ultimately immaterial what terms we choose. Indeed, the diversity of conflicting and overlapping terminologies conceals here a wide area of agreement among linguists, stretching from the more orthodox schools to the Danish glossematists, with their distinction between 'expression' and 'content'.

In other words, Ullmann equates his use of French *sens* with English 'sense', and his use of French *signification* with English 'meaning' — and he does so within the context of the Saussurean and Hjelmslevian tradition of which Greimas is a part.

With this bit of background, we are now ready to consider Greimas's usage of the term *signification*. In particular, we will consider the expression *la structure élémentaire de la signification*. As we have seen, this expression has been variously translated as 'the elementary structure of signification' and 'the elementary structure of meaning'.

This expression occurs in a couple of the essays in *On Meaning*; but it can be traced back to Greimas's first major publication, *Sémantique structurale* (1966). It is to that work that we must turn first in our efforts to understand Greimas's use of some key technical terms.

Note first that the expression 'structural semantics' suggests to language specialists some version of componential analysis — the analysis of the sense of words (more exactly, lexemes) into a set of basic components. Lyons (1977: 317), in a discussion of structural semantics, mentions Greimas as one of the leading representatives of the European version of componential analysis, which is in the post-Saussurean tradition.

In the opening chapter of his book, Greimas defines some basic terms in a way that clearly indicates that he is working within the Saussurean tradition:

Pour constituer les premiers éléments d'une terminologie opérationnelle, on désignera du nom de *signifiant* les éléments ou les groupements d'éléments qui rendent possible l'apparition de la signification au niveau de la perception ... . Du nom de *signifié*, on désignera la signification ou les significations qui sont recouvertes par le signifiant et manifestées grâce à son existence. (1966: 10)

Note that Greimas does not define *signification*, but uses it as the definiens of both *signifiant* and *signifié*. He follows Saussure's occasional practice of equating *le signifié* with *signification*. Insofar as Saussure's term *le signifié* is identified with the meaning of a sign, then *la signification* would be translated by the English term 'meaning'.

A few pages later, Greimas refers to the 'closure of the semantic universe' — the fact that in a dictionary, words can be defined only with other words. Recognition of closure implies '*le rejet des conceptions*

*linguistiques qui définissent la signification comme la relation entre les signes et les choses, et notamment le refus d'accepter la dimension supplémentaire du référent ...*' (1966: 13).

As the preceding quote shows, Greimas rejects the conception of signification as the relation between a sign and a thing (its referent). However, he apparently does not embrace the conception of signification as the relation between *signifiant* (expression) and *signifié* (meaning, content). (My own preference would be to restrict English 'signification' to referring to the relation between expression and content.)

Greimas introduces the notion of *la structure élémentaire de la signification* in the second chapter of his book. In a nutshell, this notion refers to the binary articulation of a semic category (also referred to as a 'semantic axis') into two opposing semes. For example, the category 'sex' is articulated (i.e., subdivided) into 'masculine' and 'feminine' (cf. Saussure 1965: 26 on the 'articulation' of meaning). Semes are defined as minimal units of the *signifié* (1966: 30). Semes thus correspond to what Hjelmslev (1961) called *figurae*, and Katz and Fodor (1963) called 'semantic markers'.

Greimas (1966: 19) emphasizes that single terms do not possess meaning; meaning arises through differences. Thus 'masculine' is a meaningful unit because of its differentiation from 'feminine'. Here Greimas follows Saussure, who argued, for instance, that it is not *Gäste* which expresses 'plural', but the opposition *Gast*–*Gäste*.

Greimas (1966: 27) does not include lexemes, such as 'boy' and 'girl', in the definition of *la structure élémentaire de la signification*, which is at the level of immanence. Lexemes are minimal units at the level of manifestation, defined as the linking of the *signifiant* and the *signifié* (or the plane of expression and the plane of content, in Hjelmslev's terminology). It is clear that, in this context at least, Greimas's use of the term *signification* does not denote the relation between *signifiant* and *signifié*; this is further evidence that *la structure élémentaire de la signification* is properly translated as 'the elementary structure of meaning'.

Greimas notes (1966: 38) that the relations among semes within a word can be envisioned as being of the same nature as relations among semes located within larger units of communication: for example, *abricot* — *pomme de terre* 'potato' — *pain de seigle* 'rye bread'. This observation allows structural semantics to extend beyond the individual word. Also contributing to a broader inquiry is the concern for the role of linguistic context in varying the meaning of a word: e.g., the various senses of 'head' in 'he lost his head', 'he has a full head', 'the head of the class', etc. Greimas calls the invariant meaning of a lexeme the *semic nucleus*. The linguistic context provides contextual semes, termed *classemes*. The

combination of nuclear semes and classemes yields a particular *effet de sens*, which Greimas labels a *sememe*. The sememe corresponds to what, in English, is usually termed a particular sense of a word.

We have seen that Greimas distinguishes between immanence and manifestation. What needs to be further specified is that he regards manifestation as occurring in the form of discourse; for example, he refers to '*la manifestation de la signification sous forme de discours, qui fait apparaître le contenu comme une succession d'effets de sens*' (1966: 106).

However, it should be stressed that by 'discourse' Greimas means more or less what Hjelmslev called 'text', which he identified with the notion of process (cf. Saussure's notion of *parole* as discourse). The goal of linguistic analysis, for Hjelmslev, is to discover the system behind the text; this 'system', however, is identified with the language itself, and not with a separate text system or underlying text structure.

Greimas characterizes the manifestation of meaning (*la signification*) as possessing a double articulation: semes combine to form sememes, and sememes combine to form 'messages', a vague term that is not defined. Message formation is described by a syntactic model, which Greimas claims is strikingly simple — due to the fact that the sentence is the maximum sequence of discourse within which the properly linguistic organization of content is effected (1966: 127). The reason for this, in turn, is said to be the conditions imposed on the apprehension of meaning, which is a matter of the simultaneous apprehension of terms; only about six or so terms can be simultaneously grasped. A small number of semic categories simultaneously grasped as a structure constitutes a semantic 'microuniverse'.

In the final chapter of his book, Greimas presents a sample description of one such semantic microuniverse. This chapter clearly illustrates the very restricted or special sense in which Greimas can be said to be concerned with texts in the 'structural semantics' phase of his work. The 'text' that is the object of description consists of the complete writings of the French novelist Georges Bernanos. More exactly, Greimas himself does not directly deal with this corpus; he bases his description on an Istanbul doctoral thesis by Tahsin Yücel which is an exercise in literary criticism.

Greimas's point of departure is the observation that the lexemes *vie* 'life' and *mort* 'death' play an important role in Bernanos's microuniverse. Given the way that Bernanos uses these terms — e.g., *mort* is modified by the adjectives *noire* 'black' and *froide* 'cold' — it is evident that they have a symbolic/thematic sense in his writings.

The first step in determining these special senses is typical of any lexicographic study — all the contexts in which *vie* and *mort* occur are

extracted from the corpus (1966: 223). Although Greimas does not say so explicitly, these contexts consist of phrases and clauses within which the lexemes in question occur. This type of literary analysis is not unique — it calls to mind what Kenneth Burke (1957: 56ff) has called 'cluster analysis'. There are several stages of analysis, none of which are illustrated with actual text from Bernanos. Our present concern is with the outcome (or at least one stage): the specification of the content of *vie* in terms of six sememes, and likewise for the content of *mort*. Underlying the sememes is a semic analysis, which allows a distinction between positive (V) and negative (non M) definitions of *vie*, and between positive (M) and negative (non V) definitions of *mort*. These results are presented in a tabular array (1966: 228).

Greimas (1966: 233) observes that, instead of a simple opposition of *vie* vs. *mort*, we have a correlation of two binary categories:

$$\frac{V}{\text{non V}} \approx \frac{M}{\text{non M}}$$

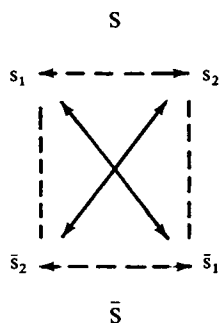
Greimas refers to the above as the 'constitutional model' (*modèle constitutionnel*), distinguishing it from the 'transformational model', a term he used in the preceding chapter to refer to his reanalysis of Propp's analysis of the Russian fairy tale as a sequence of functions.

Let us turn now from *Sémantique structurale* to the later writings that are included in *On Meaning*. These reflect a major shift in Greimas's orientation, though one that is masked to some extent by the recurrence of terminology. For example, in 'The interaction of semiotic constraints', the first major heading of the paper is 'The structure of the constitutional model'. Immediately below this is the subheading 'The elementary structure of signification' (p. 49). (It is only in a later essay that the term 'semiotic square' is introduced; see p. 108). Figure 3 corresponds to what Greimas introduces at this point as the elementary structure of meaning. He characterizes it as 'simply a reworked formulation of the one formerly proposed by the author in *Sémantique structurale*' (p. 49). He also notes that this same structure can be formulated as 'the correlating of two paired categories, the correlation itself being defined as a relation of homologized contradictions' (p. 50):

$$\frac{s_1}{\bar{s}_1} \approx \frac{s_2}{\bar{s}_2}$$

Greimas refers to this as a model 'justifying a certain number of particular semantic universes', and he cites that of Georges Bernanos as one example.





- ←--→: relation between contraries
- ←→: relation between contradictories
- : relation of implication

Figure 3

It would appear that the elementary structure of meaning has been assimilated into (or reinterpreted as) the constitutional model. In effect, the elementary structure has been expanded from the binary articulation of a single semantic axis to the binary articulation of two axes. Furthermore, rather than one disjunctive relation, Greimas now recognizes two types of disjunction. The two semes of a semantic axis are in a disjunctive relation of contrariety, and the two axes are in a disjunctive relation of contradiction.

The rationale for this expansion of the elementary structure of meaning is not made clear. Greimas merely states that 'if the signification  $S$  (the universe as a signifying whole, or any semiotic system) appears, at the level of its initial apprehension, as a semantic axis, it is opposed to  $\bar{S}$ , taken as an absolute absence of meaning, and contradictory to the term  $S'$ ' (p. 49). However, if  $\bar{S}$  is the 'absolute absence of meaning', it is hard to see how it could be articulated into contrary semes. Greimas later notes that the two contrary semes of the  $S$  axis, 'taken separately, point to the existence of their contradictory terms'.

Greimas notes that his (expanded) formulation of the elementary structure of meaning is identical to Lévi-Strauss's (1955) model of myth; and he states that 'for the semiotician it is comforting to note that a deductive approach encounters empirically constructed models that can account for the limited corpora' (p. 50). However, one might be tempted to suspect that Greimas's deductive approach was in fact influenced by Lévi-Strauss's formulation.

In his early programmatic paper, Lévi-Strauss presents a brief analysis of the Oedipus myth. Its meaning is formulated in the following terms: the

overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Lévi-Strauss refers to this formulation as correlated pairs of contradictory statements. But at another point he makes reference to contraries. The relation between 'overrating' and 'underrating' is certainly one of contrariety, and not contradiction.

The relation of contradiction likewise does not enter into Greimas's original formulation of the constitutional model, as applied to a description of Bernanos's microsemantic universe. It will be recalled that Greimas, in his discussion of Bernanos, indicated that the content of *vie* could be specified by six sememes, with each sememe in turn consisting of a small number of semes. The same holds true for the content of *mort*. If we take corresponding semes for V, non V, M, and non M and plug them into the constitutional model, one possible result would be as follows:

$$\frac{\text{transparency}}{\text{opacity}} \approx \frac{\text{heaviness}}{\text{lightness}}$$

The relation between *transparency* and *opacity* is one of contrariety, not one of contradiction; likewise for the relation between *heavy* and *light*. (Incidentally, one would expect the above correlation to read 'transparency is to opacity as lightness is to heaviness'.)

The fact that the relation of contradiction does not enter into this original formulation of the constitutional model is obscured by Greimas's notational practice. One may be tempted to read *non s* as the contradiction of *s*; that is, *non s* may seem to be no more than a notational variant of  $\bar{s}$ , used in the later formulation of the constitutional model to indicate the contradictory of *s*. But in Greimas's (1966) initial discussion of the elementary structure of meaning, *non s* indicates the contrary of *s*; for example, the relation between *grand* 'large' and *petit* 'small' is represented as

$$s \text{ vs } \text{non } s$$

In his later writings Greimas uses subscripts to differentiate contraries; thus the relation between *grand* and *petit* would be represented as

$$s_1 \text{ vs } s_2$$

Greimas (1966: 225), in his discussion of Bernanos, at one point refers to *vie* and *mort* as 'contradictory terms' and also as 'contradictory and complementary terms'. This raises the issue of how the relations of contradiction and contrariety are to be defined. In 'The interaction of semiotic constraints' Greimas treats these as undefined concepts (p. 49). Strictly speaking, these are notions that are used in logic; they do not typically occur in discussions of the semantics of natural languages.

In traditional logic, the relations of contradiction and contrariety are defined with reference to the Square of Opposition (see Figure 4). The terms *A*, *E*, *I*, and *O* represent logical propositions. *A* stands for propositions of the form 'all S is P'; *E*, for 'no S is P'; *I*, for 'some S is P'; *O*, for 'some S is not P'. *A* and *E* (and *I* and *O*) are in a relation of contrariety, in the sense that both cannot be true, but both can be false. *A* and *O* (and *E* and *I*) are contradictories — both cannot be true and both cannot be false.

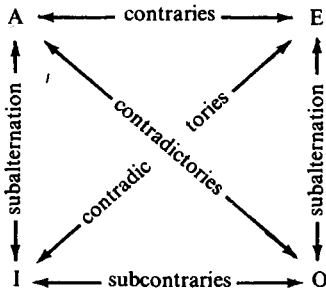


Figure 4

Greimas's notions of the contrary and the contradictory cannot be seen as identical to the logical notions, in that he deals with relations between semes and not propositions. However, semes are regarded as properties of object terms (1966: 27); for instance, 'feminine' is a property of the term *fille*. Thus the seme 'feminine' could be seen as implicitly a proposition of the form 'all girls are feminine', or 'all girls are females'. However, in terms of the Square of Opposition, the contrary of this proposition would be 'no girls are females', and the contradictory would be 'some girls are not females'.

Greimas's semiotic square is obviously not identical to the Square of Opposition. His distinction between the contrary and the contradictory can best be related to the distinction, drawn in structural semantics, between gradable and ungradable lexical opposites (Lyons 1977: 271ff). Ungradable opposites dichotomize a state of affairs, leaving no middle ground; thus, they could be seen as in a relation of contradiction. The terms 'dead' and 'alive', as normally used, are ungradable opposites. Thus, if we say of someone that he is 'not alive', that is taken to imply that he is dead. Likewise, if we say of someone that he is 'not dead', that implies that he is alive. However, in discussions of semantics, terms such as 'alive' and 'dead' (or 'life' and 'death') are generally not termed

contradictory; rather, the usual term is *complementary*. It will be recalled that Greimas referred to *vie* and *mort* as 'contradictory and complementary terms' (1966: 225). Another example of a pair of complementary terms is *male-female*.

An example of a pair of gradable opposites is 'large' and 'small'. If something is described as not large, it is not necessarily small; likewise, something that is not small is not necessarily large. The propositions 'X is large' and 'X is small' might both be false; it might be the case that X is medium. In this respect, gradable opposites correspond to logical contraries.

It should be obvious that Greimas's semiotic square has as its basis a binary contrast between gradable opposites. It is only such opposites that can 'generate' contradictory terms. In the case of ungradable opposites, there is no distinction between the contrary and the contradictory. In ordinary usage, 'life' and 'death' are ungradable. To form the basis of the four-term structure that is the semiotic square, they have to be interpreted as gradable (i.e., as contraries). In such a case, 'not death', for example, would not be equivalent to 'life'. However, it is by no means obvious that a conception of a gradation between life and death can capture the literary notion of a death-in-life.

Let us consider one further comparison between Greimas's semiotic square and the Square of Opposition in traditional logic. In the Square of Opposition, the relation between *A* and *I* is one of subalternation. Given the truth of *A*, one can logically infer the truth of *I*, but not vice versa. For example, if 'all cats are animals' is true, then so is the proposition 'some cats are animals'. Note, however, that given the proposition 'Some animals are cats', one cannot logically infer that 'All animals are cats'.

With respect to his model of the elementary structure of meaning, Greimas postulates what he terms a relation of implication between  $s_1$  and  $\bar{s}_2$ . In a footnote, Greimas states that 'Although the existence of this type of relation seems undeniable, the problem of its orientation ( $s_1 \rightarrow \bar{s}_2$  or  $\bar{s}_2 \rightarrow s_1$ ) has not yet been settled' (p. 228). As Bremond (1973: 93) has noted, this is a surprising thing to assert, for in logic there is no question as to orientation. Bremond goes on to note that in fact Greimas opts for the orientation from the subcontrary to the contrary, which goes against logic; that is, he proceeds as if 'not rich' implies 'poor', rather than vice versa.

To recapitulate, we saw that initially the elementary structure of meaning pertains to the componential analysis of individual lexemes. At the end of *Sémantique structurale*, Greimas's concern is with the symbolic/thematic use of the lexemes *vie* and *mort* as manifested in the discourse of the novelist Bernanos, where the 'discourse' consists of the totality of

his writings. Greimas organizes these symbolic senses by means of an achronic structure of four terms, which he terms the 'constitutional model'. At the beginning of 'The interaction of semiotic constraints', we saw that Greimas has reinterpreted the elementary structure of meaning, in light of the constitutional model, as a structure of four terms, with relations of contrariety and contradiction.

But the major difference between earlier and later conceptions is that the constitutional model is no longer simply a means of organizing the discursive manifestation of senses of lexemes in a body of writing. Instead, it is now seen as specifying the 'deep structure' of a narrative text. As Greimas phrases it, 'we can imagine that, in order to achieve the construction of cultural objects (literary, mythical, pictorial, etc.), the human mind begins with simple elements and follows a complex trajectory ... that moves from immanence to manifestation in three principal stages' (p. 48). Those stages are (1) deep narrative structures, specified by the elementary structure of meaning; (2) surface narrative structures, described by a modified Proppian analysis; and (3) structures of manifestation, which are studied 'by the surface stylistics of lexemes, shapes, colors, etc.' (p. 49).

Aside from two chapters devoted to Propp, narrative structures play no role in *Sémantique structurale*. One indicator of the place narrative structure comes to assume in Greimas's work can be seen in his remarks at the beginning of the essay 'On anger: A lexical semantic study': 'Lexemes are notorious for often appearing as condensations concealing, if one takes the trouble to analyze them, very complex discursive and narrative structures' (p. 148). Such a conception of the lexeme is consistent with the notion that the elementary structure of meaning, originally developed for the structural analysis of vocabulary, can serve as the basis for analyzing the underlying structure of a narrative text. The adequacy of such a unified conception is an open question. However, it can be defended insofar as it emphasizes that the narrative text is a unit of meaning and not just a unit of expression, and furthermore that this is not a special kind of meaning.

Greimas's conception of the production of a narrative text as a three-stage generative trajectory — from deep narrative grammar to surface narrative grammar to linguistic manifestation — remains highly programmatic and has never been fully spelled out. Greimas has focused on individual stages, or levels, more or less ignoring the crucial aspect of transition between stages, or levels. Of the three stages, Greimas has most fully worked out a surface narrative grammar.

Let us briefly consider the transition from deep to surface narrative grammar. The deep level, in effect, specifies the thematic or symbolic

significance of a narrative, expressed in terms of the semiotic square. One example of a thematic structure would involve life and death as contraries, and life-not life and death-not death as contradictories. The transition from this deep structure to surface narrative structure is, in effect, the transition from thematic structure to plot structure. Greimas has referred to this as 'the narrativization of taxonomy' (p. 68). The first step is the establishment of an equivalence between the *relation* of contradiction and the *operation* of forming the contradictory of a term. (This step is prefigured in *Sémantique structurale* in the notion of a 'dialectical algorithm' applied to the description of Bernanos's microuniverse — see Greimas 1966: 252ff).

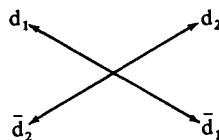
This is still at the deep — or 'conceptual' — realm. The surface level is a matter of an anthropomorphic representation of the operations; that is, operations become 'doings', with human (or at least anthropomorphized) subjects. A doing has the form of a basic narrative utterance:

$$NU = F(A)$$

where  $F$  = function and  $A$  = actant (p. 71). The plot of a narrative is represented as a sequence of such narrative utterances.

I do not want to comment here on the adequacy of Greimas's conception of surface narrative structure. It bears some similarities to my own approach, the foundations of which I worked out prior to any acquaintance with Greimas (see Hendricks 1965). However, I will point out that Greimas's surface narrative structure is not in a term-by-term correspondence with the four terms (constituting the semiotic square) of the deep grammar, despite his assertions to the contrary (p. 75).

Let us consider one instance in which Greimas does try to relate plot development to the semiotic square. This involves giving a 'topological' interpretation to the square (see Figure 5). This particular interpretation is supposed to account for plot sequences in Russian fairy tales (the object of Propp's investigation). For example, 'Society ( $d_1$ ) experiences a lack,



$d_1$  = society/the king's palace  
 $\bar{d}_2$  = 'elsewhere'/the villain's den  
 $\bar{d}_1$  = villain  
 $d_2$  = hero

Figure 5

the traitor [villain] ( $\bar{d}_1$ ) kidnaps the king's daughter ( $O$ ) and takes her elsewhere in order to hide her ( $d_2$ )' (p. 78).

In terms of operations on the semiotic square, this plot sequence is a matter of forming the contradictory of  $d_1$  and inferring  $d_2$  from  $\bar{d}_1$ . However, as we saw earlier, the Square of Opposition in logic disallows this inference; the only valid inference would be from  $d_2$  to  $\bar{d}_1$ . In any case, to show the kidnapping of the princess, all that is required, in terms of a topological interpretation of the semiotic square, would be the operation of taking the contrary of  $d_1$ , yielding  $d_2$ .

Note, too, that only  $d_1$  and  $d_2$ , strictly speaking, are given a topological interpretation;  $d_1$  and  $d_2$  are individuals, not places. Consequently, in what sense can one say that society/the king's palace ( $d_1$ ) and the villain ( $\bar{d}_1$ ) are in a relation of contradiction? The same can be asked of the relation between the villain's den ( $d_2$ ) and the hero ( $\bar{d}_2$ ) (cf. Bremond 1973: 97).

Suppose we try to give a topological interpretation to all four terms. If  $d_1$  represents the king's palace, then what  $\bar{d}_1$  would represent would be all of the places outside the palace walls. Likewise, if  $d_2$  represents the villain's den, then  $\bar{d}_2$  would represent all of the places exterior to the den (Bremond 1973: 97).

The problem with Greimas's 'topological' interpretation of the semiotic square should not be taken as evidence that the square cannot be applied to plot analysis. In my approach to narrative analysis, plot structure is represented by a series of what I call 'narrative propositions', of the form  $f(X, Y)$ . Only a small number of 'functions', in the logical sense, are required to represent plot; these functions form a Klein group, in the mathematical sense (see Hendricks 1977a). As Greimas has noted, his semiotic square is comparable to the Klein group (p. 50).

However, in my approach to narrative, I do not analyze theme in terms of the Klein group, nor do I attempt to derive plot structure from thematic structure. My position is that they are two separate aspects of narrative structure. More exactly, the two aspects are plot structure and character structure, with the latter taken in an expanded sense to encompass theme. (Characters are often bearers of thematic significance.) Furthermore, character structure is seen as in a sense subordinate to plot structure — a position congruent with that of Aristotle in his *Poetics*.

Elsewhere (Hendricks 1977b: 12ff) I have suggested that the Aristotelian notion of plot dominance could be interpreted in terms of a linguistic analogy. At one time many linguists were suggesting that the logical analysis of sentences could serve as their deep structure representation; to give a simplified example, the deep structure of the sentence 'John saw the anthropologist' could be represented as follows:

saw ( $X_1, X_2$ ).John ( $X_1$ ).anthropologist ( $X_2$ )

However, McCawley (1971: 223) has pointed out that such a logical representation fails to capture the meaning, in normal usage, of the sentence. According to the conventions of logic, to deny a conjunction is to assert that at least one of the conjuncts is false. But someone who says 'I deny that John saw the anthropologist' is specifically denying the conjunct 'saw ( $X_1, X_2$ )'. McCawley thus suggests that in some sense the meanings of the expressions 'John' and 'the anthropologist' play a subordinate role in the meaning of the sentence 'John saw the anthropologist'.

There is one final aspect of Greimas's semiotic theory of narrative that I want to examine here. This concerns his dichotomy between narrative structures and linguistic structures. More exactly, the distinction is between narrative structures and '*structures of manifestation*' [which] produce and organize the signifiers' (p. 48). This terminological distinction is necessary to capture Greimas's view that 'narrative structures can be found elsewhere than in manifestations of meaning effected through the natural languages. They can be found in cinematographic and oniric [sic] languages, in figurative painting, and so forth' (p. 64).

Greimas could be criticized for using the term 'language' in a loose sense. However, consider what he has to say about oneiric and cinematographic 'language' in *Semantique structurale*.

Une langue naturelle, prise en tant qu'*ensemble signifiant*, peut être transposée et réalisée dans un ordre sensoriel différent. Ainsi, le langage onirique n'est que la transposition de la langue naturelle dans un ordre visuel particulier (divisible, à son tour, en deux sous-ordres: en couleurs, ou en noir et blanc) ... Il en est de même du langage cinématographique. (1966: 12)

These remarks would suggest that Greimas intends reference to, say, 'oneiric language' to be interpreted in a rather exact sense. However, one major problem with talking about a 'language' of visual images — whether in painting, dreams, the cinema, or whatever — is the lack of standardized minimal units of expression (see Benveniste 1969: 128). In the case of natural language, the plane of expression can be analyzed into basic units of sound, termed *phonemes*; phonemes, in turn, can be analyzed into minimal units, *distinctive features*. It is not possible to correlate phonemes with, say, pictorial units. In other words, there is no cultural convention for digitizing images that corresponds to the conventional 'digitalization' of human speech.

It is certainly the case that a visual experience can be verbalized. In the case of dreams, we can describe to someone a dream we had, and this



account will generally take the form of a narrative. However, this does not imply that a common narrative structure underlies the dream and the verbal report of it.

My own position is that the narrative structure underlying, say, a short story is a 'verbal' structure in the sense that the narrative structure has no independent existence apart from a natural human language. This is actually close to a view Greimas goes on to express, in the course of talking about the transition from deep narrative structure to surface narrative structure in terms of a transition from logical *operations* to *doing*. He adds, 'when we speak of doing, it is clear that we are not thinking of "real" doing ... but of a *linguistic doing* (whatever the language, natural or not, in which it is manifested). That is, we are dealing with a doing that has been transcoded into a message' (p. 71). I would only object to Greimas's failure to restrict language to natural language.

Recognition of the 'verbal' nature of narrative structure does not invalidate the distinction Greimas draws between narrative structure and the language of the narrative text, as evidenced in the following ways: (1) There is the lack of a 1-1 correspondence between, say, plot units and sentences that constitute the narrative text. In some instances, a single plot unit may correspond to a paragraph of the narrative text; in other instances, it may correspond to a couple of sentences; and so on. Plot units, in short, do not simply consist of actual sentences or sequences of sentences of the narrative text. (2) A story can be translated into a different language, without the narrative structure changing. (Actually, given Greimas's unified approach to lexemes and narratives, this purported independence of narrative and language could be challenged in terms of the Whorfian hypothesis.)

We have seen that Greimas refers to the 'manifestation' of narrative structure, by which he means the sequence of sentences constituting the narrative text. Consider the following summary remarks he makes at the end of the essay 'Elements of a narrative grammar':

Once such a narrative grammar has been completed it will ... trace a group of trajectories that are followed in the manifestation of meaning: Starting with the elementary operations of the deep grammar ... and continuing with the combinations of the syntagmatic series of the surface grammar (which are nothing more than the anthropomorphic representations of these operations), the contents ... become invested within the narrative utterance. These are organized in linear sequences that are connected ... by a series of logical implications. Once we are able to identify such series of narrative utterances, and if we also enlist the help of a rhetoric, a stylistics, and a linguistic grammar, we will be able to conceive of the linguistic manifestation of narrativized signification. (pp. 82-83)

We can relate these remarks to those Greimas makes in the very early pages of *Sémantique structurale*, where the discussion concerns the manifestation of structures of meaning: '*La communication, en effet, réunit les conditions de leur manifestation, car c'est dans l'acte de communication ... que le signifié retrouve le signifiant*' (1966: 30). Greimas goes on to note that in Hjelmslev's terminology, manifestation is a junction of the plane of expression and the plane of content. Strictly speaking, Hjelmslev's notion of manifestation, or realization, is that of an asymmetric relation holding between the strata of form and substance of a single plane — either that of expression or that of content. The relation between the planes of content and expression, in contrast, is a symmetric relation.

The major point to be made here, however, is that Greimas retains the simple model of the junction of a *signifié* and a *signifiant* to describe narrative discourse. The only difference between the *signifié* of a lexeme (such as *fille*) and a narrative (such as one of the Russian fairy tales) is that the *signifié* of the latter is said to be more articulated, in the sense recognized by Saussure (1965: 26).

Let me briefly cite an example here, discussed in more detail elsewhere (Hendricks 1988), that will indicate the inadequacy of Greimas's simple biplanar model of narrative discourse. In the Russian fairy tale 'The miraculous pipe' there occurs the sentence, "Brother," Alionushka said, "let me pick the lice out of your hair." This isolated sentence can be analyzed as a junction of a sequence of expression units and a sequence of content units; the content can be understood by any speaker of English. However, as a constituent of a story, the sentence requires a further stage of decoding, in order for us to understand its contribution to the plot development. In terms of Propp's analysis, this sentence manifests, in part, the function of Trickery (the villain deceives the hero).

The extra step in decoding narrative discourse indicates the need for recognizing more than a single plane of expression and a single plane of content in our conception of narrative discourse. To this end, I have adapted Hjelmslev's notion of a *connotative semiotic*. A 'semiotic' can be analyzed into a plane of expression and a plane of content. A 'connotative semiotic' is a semiotic whose plane of expression is itself a semiotic. As applied to a narrative text, the sequence of sentences constituting the text — regarded as a junction of first-order expression and content — serves as a second-order expression for a second-order content. In the example from Propp, the function Trickery is a second-order content.

More than likely, this notion of second-order expression and second-order content is too simple. One might question exactly how thematic meaning fits in. Greimas has a simple answer, but I feel that it is too simple. The semiotic square is forced to bear more weight than it can sustain.

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- William O. Hendricks (b. 1939) focuses in his research on narrative analysis, analysis of

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