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TWO PRINCIPLES IN DEFINITIONS

OF AN EXPLANATORY-COMBINATORIAL DICTIONARY

Introduction

Any definition of a lexeme appearing in an Explanatory-Combinatorial Dictionary (ECD)<sup>1</sup> relies on three basic principles:

- (a) the adequacy principle,
- (b) the semantic bridge principle,
- (c) the homogeneity principle.

Due to lack of space, I will limit myself to the presentation and illustration of the first of these three principles and will briefly present the second.

The adequacy principle

The lexicographic definition of a lexeme must be adequate; that is to say, it contain all and nothing but the necessary components that are sufficient to define uniquely the lexeme in question, in all of its possible uses.

(Mel'čuk et al. 1983:105)

I will discuss four of the most important components appearing in the definitions of numerous lexemes of the four French vocables PERMETTRE, DEFENDRE, AUTORISER and INTERDIRE. (For definitions, see Note 2). First, I will discuss the difference between the components 'volonté'/'will' and 'droit'/'right', second, the optional component '(lié(e) de la façon la plus usuelle à)'/ '(linked in the most usual way to)', and third, the choice of 'croyant'/'believing' instead of 'croyant ou sachant'/'believing or knowing'.

'Volonté' appears in permettre 1a and défendre 1, this component is contrasted to 'droit' which appears in autoriser 1, autoriser 3, interdire 1, interdire 3a and interdire 3b.<sup>2</sup>

The choice of these two components serves to draw a line between two pairs of vocables: PERMETTRE - DEFENDRE as opposed to AUTORISER - INTERDIRE.<sup>3</sup>

The two components account for the semantic difference that holds between (1a) - (2a) and (1b) - (2b):

- (1a) Le responsable a permis aux enfants de se baigner.
  - (1b) Le responsable a défendu aux enfants de se baigner.
- } 'volonté'

- (2a) Le responsable a autorisé les enfants à se baigner.  
(2b) Le responsable a interdit aux enfants de se baigner. } 'droit'

Speaking of somebody who permet/défend is talking about his personal judgment and responsibility; speaking of somebody who autorise/interdit is talking about a certain right this person exercises over others.

The difference is more striking in cases where that very person can almost never be considered as having received power; that is, an unambiguous right to autoriser or interdire. For example, I feel that a young child - say of 5 or 6 years old - could never say:

- (3a) \*J'ai autorisé mon père à entrer dans ma chambre.  
(3b) \*J'ai interdit à mon père d'entrer dans ma chambre.

To express his keen sense of property, he would instead use:

- (4a) J'ai permis à mon père d'entrer dans ma chambre.  
(4b) J'ai défendu à mon père d'entrer dans ma chambre.

There is certainly no clear-cut borderline between usages of permettre 1, défendre 1 and autoriser 1, interdire 1, according to my definitions: the usage depends on the personal conception each individual has of the notions 'volonté' and 'droit', something that should not be handled by semantics per se.

For example, one of my colleagues pointed out that she would rather use (5a) than (5b), but (6b) rather than (6a).

- (5a) Je te défends de toucher au gâteau.  
(5b) Je t'interdis de toucher au gâteau.  
  
(6a) Je t'interdis de me parler sur ce ton.  
(6b) Je te défends de me parler sur ce ton.

It is interesting to note the different situations involved in the examples she gave: the sentences in (6) refer to a situation where somebody feels offended or shocked, which cannot be the case in (5). But I think (5b) and (6a) may well be preferred in many situations. For example, let us suppose a parent, annoyed for a while by his child who has tried a few times to grab a piece of cake baked for a special occasion: I feel the parent would use (5b), appealing to his/her authority; that is, to his/her 'right'. Conversely, (6b) could certainly be used, especially if one imagines a situation where you want to remind your interlocutor that you wish to be talked to with more respect, although you do not feel you have the right to demand it, this person being, for example, your very best friend or your parent.

The component '(lié(e) de la façon la plus usuelle à)''/'(linked in the most usual way to)' appearing in permettre 1a, 3 and 4, in défendre 1, 2, 3, in autoriser 1, 2, 4 and in interdire 1, 2, 3, is an optional one. Therefore, 'action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y' and 'fait (lié de la façon la plus usuelle

à) X' both have two readings; that is, 'action Y' or 'action liée de la façon la plus usuelle à Y' and 'fait X' or 'fait lié de la façon la plus usuelle à X'. The reading that includes the component handles sentences like (7) as opposed to (8) - constructed on the basis of the first lexeme of the corresponding vocable:

- (7) Son médecin lui a permis [ a défendu, a autorisé, a interdit] l'alcool.
- (8) Son médecin lui a permis [ a défendu, a autorisé, a interdit] cette sortie.

In (7), 'alcool' is not an action - but 'sortie', in (8), is: in all cases, it is understood as 'boire de l'alcool' - e.g. boire de l'alcool, prendre de l'alcool, toucher à l'alcool. To ensure the adequacy of the definition, we have to take into account this semantic possibility. The component 'action Y' alone is not sufficient to describe this use, so we have added the component '(lié(e) de la façon la plus usuelle à)'

Now, what about the formulation of the component? We have already noticed that alcool in (7) can only mean 'boire de l'alcool'; that is, certainly, the most usual action you could ever associate with 'alcool'. Thus, sentence (7) cannot be interpreted as (9):

- (9a) Son médecin lui a permis [ a défendu, a interdit] de reprendre son commerce d'alcool [d'offrir de l'alcool à ses visiteurs].
- (9b) Son médecin l'a autorisé à reprendre son commerce d'alcool [à offrir de l'alcool à ses visiteurs].

To express the meanings of (9a) and (9b), we have to use the verbs reprendre and offrir; that is, to express the action involved in the sentence, the action here associated with alcool.

For défendre 3 and permettre 4, this optional component appears along with 'fait...X' and, as in the case of 'action...Y', takes care of uses like (10a), (10b), where 'X' is syntactically expressed as the grammatical subject:

- (10a) Une boussole lui aurait permis de s'orienter.
- (10b) Ses souliers lui défendent de danser.

The sentences in (10) can only be interpreted as (11):

- (11a) Avoir eu sa boussole lui aurait permis de s'orienter.
- (11b) Avoir ces souliers aux pieds lui défend de danser.

The last component to be discussed is 'croyant'/'believing', which appears in permettre 1a, défendre 1, autoriser 1 and interdire 1.

The component 'croyant' expresses the fact that the person X

may just imagine or believe that Z wants to do something, as in (12):

- (12) Je vois que tes amis s'en vont à la piscine. Je te permets d'y aller.  
Mais je ne veux pas aller à la piscine, j'ai envie d'aller au cinéma!

The situation in which this dialogue could take place implies that X, not knowing if Z wanted to go to the swimming-pool or not, guessed, although wrongly, that he wanted to. 'Croyant'/'believing' is thus preferable to 'sachant'/'knowing'. However, in many situations, X knows that Z wants to do something, as in (13):

- (13a) En réponse à sa demande, le directeur lui a permis de s'absenter.  
(13b) En dépit de ses demandes répétées, le directeur lui a défendu [a interdit] de s'absenter.  
(13c) En réponse à sa demande, le directeur l'a autorisé a s'absenter.

Sentences like these could suggest an additional component, 'sachant', resulting in something like 'croyant ou sachant que...'. But, following a proposal of Wierzbicka (1969), we consider that the definition of 'savoir' contains 'croire'; that is, 'to know' = 'to believe A and A is true'. Consequently, we have rejected 'sachant' as superfluous and kept only 'croyant', which suffices to cover all uses of the lexemes in question.

### The semantic bridge principle

The semantic bridge principle means two things.

First, any two lexemes of the same vocable have to be semantically linked. A and B are directly linked if and only if there is at least one common non-trivial component in their definitions. A and B are linked if and only if we can have a chain of direct links between A and B (so  $A \rightarrow A_1, A_1 \rightarrow A_2, A_2 \rightarrow B$ ).

Second, if A and B are directly linked, their common component must appear in quite an explicit form - which, roughly speaking, means graphical coincidence; we will refine this formulation later.

The definitions of interdire 3a and interdire 3b share two components: 'X, qui a le pouvoir institutionnellement reconnu d'enlever<sub>4</sub> [certains droits]' and 'formule que X enlève ... [certains droits]'.

The two lexemes are thus directly linked.

Sharing a component is not necessarily graphical coincidence of formulations. It can be that the lexeme A includes 'a<sub>1</sub>' and the lexeme B does not include 'a<sub>1</sub>' but includes 'b', which, in turn, includes 'a<sub>1</sub>' ('b' > 'a<sub>1</sub>').

For instance, autoriser 1 contains 'communiquer'/'communicates' which does not appear in autoriser 3, the latter containing 'formuler'/'formulates' instead. But, 'formuler' is semantically included in 'communiquer', so that, by transitivity of inclusion, autoriser 1 includes 'formuler', the difference being that 'formuler' implies a necessary verbal communication, which is not the case with 'communiquer'. This difference explains the fact that you can say (14a) but never (14b):

(14a) D'un geste de la main, le juge autorisa [A.1] l'accusé à s'asseoir.

(14b)\*D'un geste de la main, le président de la république autorisa [A.3] la nouvelle revue.

### Conclusion

The adequacy principle requires that any definition of a lexeme be adequate; that is, contain all and nothing but the necessary components that are sufficient to define uniquely the lexeme in question, in all of its possible uses. Trying our best to fulfil the requirements of this principle, we have adopted a methodological approach which is different from the one usually followed by lexicographers.

First, note that each component has to be justified. Second, in order to test the components of a definition, we systematically construct examples so that any correct use of the word to be defined should be opposed to an incorrect one. At this stage, we especially rely on negative examples as opposed to positive ones. Third, we make great use of unusual situations and, consequently, of unusual sentences; these borderline cases help a great deal to reveal very subtle semantic properties of the lexeme to be defined.

Ideally, the definitions of an Explanatory-Combinatorial Dictionary should supply, for a non-native speaker or a machine translation system, the knowledge and intuition of native speakers.

The three basic principles which we rely on - that is, adequacy of definitions, semantic bridges between lexemes of polysemous vocables, and homogeneity of definitions for related vocables - should, we believe, suffice to attain this ambitious goal.

### Notes

- 1 This paper reports on research carried out in the project 'Lexical and Semantic Studies of Modern French' financed by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Grant no. 410-82-0549).
- 2 Definitions of the lexemes of the French vocables PERMETTRE, DEFENDRE, AUTORISER and INTERDIRE are given below. Note that the English glosses below the French definitions should not be taken at their face value, but only serve as approximations.

PERMETTRE

Permettre 1a X permet à Z de Y-er = Croyant qu'une personne Z veut faire une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y et que Z ne veut pas faire cette action contre la volonté de X, X communique à Z que cette action ne serait pas contraire à la volonté de X.

Believing that a person Z wants to perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y and that Z does not want to perform this action against the will of X, X communicates to Z that this action would not be against his will.

Permettre 1b X permet à Z de Y-er = Locuteur Z voulant dire Y ou faire Y et Z considérant que Y peut être inopportun pour X, énonce permettre 1a, faisant semblant de demander à X de lui permettre 1a de Y-er.

Speaker Z wanting to say Y or to do Y and considering that Y could be inopportune for X, says permettre 1a, pretending to ask X to permettre 1a to do Y.

Permettre 2 X permet à Z de Y-er = Texte X (α) contient le message "Z a le droit de Y-er" ou (β) ne contient pas le message "Z n'a pas le droit de Y-er".

Text X (α) contains the message "Z has the right to do Y" or (β) does not contain the message "Z does not have the right to do Y".

Permettre 3 X permet à Z de Y-er = X ne fait pas exprès des actions qui rendent impossible une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y d'une personne Z.

X does not purposely perform actions which make an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y impossible for a person Z.

Permettre 4 X permet à Z de Y-er = Fait (lié de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y rend possible une action Y ou un processus Y de Z, Y n'étant pas non désirable pour Z.

Fact (linked in the most usual way to) Y makes possible an action Y or a process Y of Z, Y not being undesirable for Z.

DEFENDRE

Défendre 1 X défend à Z de Y-er = Croyant qu'une personne Z veut faire une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y et que Z ne veut pas faire cette action contre la volonté de X, X communique à Z que cette action ne serait pas contraire à la volonté de X.

Believing that a person Z wants to perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y and that Z does not want to perform this action against the will of X, X communicates to Z that this action would not be against his will.

Défendre 2 X défend à Z de Y-er = Texte X contient le message "Z n'a pas le droit de faire une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y".  
Text X contains the message "Z does not have the right to perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y".

Defendre 3 X défend à Z de Y-er = Fait (lié de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y rend impossible qu'une personne Z fasse une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y.  
Fact (linked in the most usual way to) Y makes impossible for a person Z to perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y.

#### AUTORISER

Autoriser 1 X autorise Z à Y-er = Croyant que Z veut faire une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y, X qui a le pouvoir socialement reconnu de donner à des gens le droit de faire cette action, communique à Z que X donne à Z ce droit.  
Believing that Z wants to perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y, X, who has the socially recognized power to give people the right to perform this action, communicates to Z that X gives to Z that right.

Autoriser 2 X autorise Z à Y-er = Texte X (α) contient le message "Z a le droit de faire une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y" ou (β) ne contient pas le message "Z n'a pas le droit de faire une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y".  
Text X (α) contains the message "Z has the right to perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y" or (β) does not contain the message "Z does not have the right to perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y".

Autoriser 3 X autorise Y = X, qui a le pouvoir institutionnellement reconnu de donner à des gens le droit de faire exister et/ou fonctionner Y, formule que X donne à des gens le droit de faire exister et/ou fonctionner Y.  
X, who has the institutionally recognized power to give people the right to cause to exist and/or to function Y, states that X is giving people the right to cause to exist and/or to function Y.

Autoriser 4 X autorise Z à Y-er = Fait X cause le fait suivant: Z se sent justifié de faire une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y.  
Fact X causes the following situation: Z feels justified to perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y.

INTERDIRE

- Interdire 1    X interdit à Z de Y-er = Croyant que Z veut faire une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y, X, qui a le pouvoir socialement reconnu de donner à des gens le droit de faire cette action, communique à Z que X ne donne pas à Z ce droit.  
Believing that Z wants to perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y, X, who has the socially recognized power to give people the right to perform this action, communicates to Z that X does not give Z that right.
- Interdire 2    X interdit à X de Y-er = Texte X contient le message "Z n'a pas le droit de faire une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y".  
Text X contains the message "Z does not have the right to perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y".
- Interdire 3a    X interdit Y = X, qui a le pouvoir institutionnellement reconnu d'enlever à des gens le droit de faire exister et/ou fonctionner Y, formule que X enlève à des gens le droit de faire exister et/ou fonctionner Y.  
X, who has the institutionally recognized power to deprive people of the right to cause to exist and/or to function Y, states that X is depriving people of the right to cause to exist and/or to function.
- Interdire 3b    X interdit Z de Y = X, qui a le pouvoir institutionnellement reconnu d'enlever à Z le droit d'exercer ( $\alpha$ ) des fonctions Y ou ( $\beta$ ) des droits civiques, civils ou de famille Y, formule que X enlève à Z ce droit.  
X, who has the institutionally recognized power to deprive Z of the right to exercise ( $\alpha$ ) functions Y or ( $\beta$ ) civil, civic and family rights Y, states that X is depriving Z of this right.
- Interdire 4    X interdit à Z de Y-er = Fait X cause le fait suivant: Z croit qu'il ne doit absolument pas faire une action (liée de la façon la plus usuelle à) Y.  
Fact X causes the following situation: Z believes that he absolutely should not perform an action (linked in the most usual way to) Y.
- Interdire 5    Y interdit Y à Z = Obstacle physique X placé rend impossible pour Z le déplacement Y ou l'accès Y à un espace limité ou à une voie de circulation Y.  
Physical obstacle makes impossible for Z a displacement Y or access Y to a limited space or to any road Y.



- 3 For reasons too complex to discuss here, the contrast is neutralized in the second lexeme of the four vocables, so that permettre 2 and autoriser 2 on the one hand and defendre 2 and interdire 2 on the other are semantically equivalent or absolutely synonymous, i.e. having the same definition which contains 'droit' and never 'volonté'.
- 4 It is worth noticing that the only semantic difference between the two lexemes relates to the kind of right of which somebody is deprived. The two lexemes are numbered a and b, which formally expresses that the semantic distance between them is the smallest one could ever find between lexemes and which is different from the distance expressed by numbers (1, 2, 3 etc.).

#### References

- Mel'čuk, I.A. et al. (1983) "Trois principes de description sémantique d'une unité lexicale dans un dictionnaire explicatif et combinatoire" Revue canadienne de linguistique 28,2:105-121
- Wierzbicka, A. (1969) Docicka semantyczne. Wrocław - Warszawa - Kraków: Wydawn. PAN