THE LEXICOGRAPHER AND GENERAL SEMANTICS

WITH A PLAN FOR 'A SEMANTIC GUIDE TO CURRENT ENGLISH'

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A clarification of issues results from the description of a science in extensional terms. As Korzybski says, 'The situation [causing delusional evaluation] is radically changed when we use actional or functional language, when we describe what a physicist does when he finds his "length" or "second" or any other entity he is interested in.'[1] When we apply this type of approach to the work of the lexicographer, the description is that he collects contexts in which certain words are found, and compares them for similarities and dissimilarities. He finds certain relational features to be present in some contexts, by contrast to contexts where they are absent or different. As a linguist, Dr. Zellig S. Harris, has recently observed:

> The meaning of a linguistic form may best be defined as the range of situations in which that form occurs, or more exactly, it is the features common to all the situations in which the form occurs and excluded from all those in which it does not. This furnishes a test which, though impossible in practice, is at least conceivable. In practice, we use approximations to this: the meaning of a form class is the contrast between its positions and combinations and those of the other form classes; the meaning of individual morphemes is approximated by contrasting the situations in which they occur in an utterance with the situations in which the same utterances occur without them, and so on.[2]

By recording these features of relation, which are covered by the term *meaning*, a lexicographer produces his dictionary.

Each time that a word is used in any particular context, that instance is unique, having a variation of values from every other particular context. The similarities may be sufficiently great so that the responses entailed by associations in previous contexts will permit reasonable communication;[3] but dissimilarities are also invariably present,[4] and the recognition of these should ensure a conditional response, and hence 'intelligent' consideration of whatever problem is in hand. Dissimilarities are present because precisely the same characteristics will not be abstracted in the recognition of an 'object' by any two observers, or even by one observer on successive occasions.

[1] Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (Second edition; Lancaster, Penn.: The Science Press Printing Company, 1941), p. 639.

[2] Review of Louis H. Gray, *Foundations of Language* (New York, 1939), in *Language*, XVI (July-Sept., 1940), 227.

[3] The binding of contexts is achieved by neurological mechanisms: when a response to a word-form has once passed along a certain nerve 'channel', a response to that word-form in another context tends to follow the same 'channel'.

[4] As Leonard Bloomfield states in his *Language* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1933), p. 407: 'one could say that every utterance of a speech-form involves a minute semantic innovation.'

Even on a simple level, any two people will abstract a different set of features to be covered by a word; and when these sets of features can be markedly contrasted, it may be said that the varying contexts cause a series of levels of abstraction. If the user of a word is not conscious of the shift in levels of abstraction, he sets up a barrier against what would otherwise be the appropriate response. As an example of such a blockage, we may take the word *bankruptcy*, which causes difficulties among many economists and most people in general. It appears regularly on a descriptive level, when it is used to represent the legal requirement set down in statute books or the conventions observed in personal relations; but such a statement as 'The nation will be faced with bankruptcy' brings this word that commonly represents a lower level of abstraction into a context where a higher level of abstraction is necessary. A nation with the working power of 130 million people and the resources of a rich continent could never be 'bankrupt' in the same sense as an individual who had contravened the regulations of the banking laws. Either the word *bankruptcy* should be limited in usage to the lower level of abstraction, or else appropriate (and very different) responses should be brought into play when the word is used in the context of the higher order of abstractions. Since there can be no means of restricting the usage of a word to particular contexts (apart from a scientist's *ipse dixit* in controlled frames of reference, at their best in mathematics), the solution lies in training people to be on their guard for these shifts in levels of abstraction. A person trained in general consciousness of abstracting by the techniques of general semantics would be prepared to spot such shifts, and his responses would be *delayed* and so become appropriate to the fresh context.

It would be of great service if a dictionary could make explicit for such troublesome words a series of these varying contexts. To this end I have under way a work to be called *A Semantic Guide to Current English*. The chief purpose will be to aid in eliminating such semantic blockages. The emphasis on contexts, which can be extended in an indefinite series, rather than on definitions, purporting to be all-inclusive, furnishes a basis for flexibility of semantic reactions, and for freeing a speaker from fixed responses on an infantile level. The phrase 'extensional definition' may pass in colloquial discourse, but a degree of contradiction is involved. It might be wise not to attempt to 'define' an everyday term at all, but instead to 'describe' it. The word *description* implies less of an aristotelian assumption. This description will consist of a listing of examples or a charting of the contexts in which the word is customarily found at some particular time among particular groups of people.

From the genetic point of view definitions are not necessary, as a child learns a language by experience with a long series of life contexts, not usually defined, but made significant by the factual consequences.[5] There must be undefined terms standing for first order experiences.

An untrained person, in consulting a dictionary, assumes that the relation between

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[5] We must in some way break into the circle of an accepted system of communication. This 'breaking in' occurs in childhood by the trial and error method. The refinements of mathematics have to be made from the original basis of everyday language, and for this reason mathematizing does not have autonomy, but must always remain, no matter how refined, a derivative of ordinary language, and hence liable, though in progressively smaller degrees, to its errors.

the term and the definition is one of static equivalence, and this supplied 'is' of identity leads to the creation of 'entities'. Accredited lexicographers will rightly register the objection that the user of a dictionary should interpret the relationship by saying 'This term represents so-and-so,' for 'represents' indicates the true relationship; but the damage is done for people in general. The conventional dictionary definitions are mere circumlocutions—when they delusively establish the sense of identity, they yield no 'knowledge' (i.e. information on structure or relationships). The proposed *Guide* will dispense with the tacit 'is'-of-identity definitions, by using informal statements about the word as a word—*e.g.* 'This word appears in contexts which (etc.),' or 'The range of situations in which this word does service,' or 'This term is classified among (etc.),' etc.

The purity of abstraction that gives mathematics its relative freedom is not possible in everyday speech, for non-distinctive bits of previous contexts are remembered as the word-forms are used again, and this prevents a clear-cut abstraction. Even though the abstraction will not have a one to one correspondence, the consciousness of the process involved will give the benefits outlined by Korzybski.

It is important to discriminate between the process of abstracting on the one hand (a valid and inevitable procedure), and the belief that there are 'entities' which correspond to the abstract terms on the other hand (a delusory and un-sane procedure). If linguists are to be scientific, they are forced to deal with something tangible and measurable; but nevertheless most of them have contented themselves with an objectified 'thought'.[6] The following statement by a reputable professor of language at a Middle Western university illustrates notably this objectification of 'thought': '. . . revelation of a thought,' he says, 'is comparable to the revelation of a horse at night by passing the continuous ray of a lantern along his body.'[7] An understanding of the abstracting process will be fortified by sets of contexts such as the proposed *Guide* will provide.[8]

Practitioners of 'historical semantics' have felt it necessary to distinguish between 'essential meaning', 'central meaning', or *Hauptbedeutung* on the one hand and 'applied meaning' or *Nebensinn* on the other.[9] But one is on treacherous ground in saying that a certain meaning is more 'central' than another, for at most one could merely establish

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[6] This is the chief reason, I suspect, why students of linguistics have played a very minor rôle in the development of general semantics. Furthermore, they regard 'semantics' as a small division of their field of learning, and have not awakened to the fact that 'general semantics', as formulated by Korzybski, refers to a larger co-ordinating system in which linguistics and other empirical sciences can find their place.

[7] Edward T. Owen, in *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters*, XXIII (1927), 269, note. The 'horse-at-night' theory is also the basis of Frank R. Blake's feeble and misguided article, 'The Study of Language from the Semantic Point of View,' *Indogermanische Forschungen*, LVI (December, 1939), 241-255.

[8] Aldous Huxley, *Words and their Meanings* (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1940), pp. 16-17, rightly says: 'I have already mentioned the apparently irresistible human tendency to objectify psychological states and project them, on the wings of their verbal vehicle, into the outer world. Words like those I have just mentioned ['beauty', 'goodness', 'spirit', 'personality'] are typical vehicles of objectification. They are the cause of endless intellectual confusion, endless emotional distress, endless misdirections of voluntary effort.'

[9] The theories of Erdmann, Bréal, Trench, Stöcklein, Darmesteter, de Saussure, etc., are summarized by J. R. Firth, 'The Technique of Semantics,' *Transactions of the Philological Society* [London], 1935, pp. 36-51.

a relative frequency index or a time-index on the basis of a particular body of usage, and perhaps use it as an arbitrary standard by which to compare variations in other contexts. All meanings are 'applied'; and if some may be called 'marginal', it is only on a statistical basis.

In a semantic dictionary orientated for present-day users, the remote, speculative etymology has but a small degree of relevance. Contexts of known particular time-indexes are all-important. To be sure, an etymology will sometimes reveal the assumptions behind a particular term. The word *psychology*, for instance, reflects the belief in an objectified 'psyche', and a student of general semantics can no longer use it as it was formerly used. The problems that the 'psychologist' attempted to deal with are still with us, but we can no longer use his false-to-fact terminology, or if we use his word-forms the contexts must unmistakably make plain the new orientation. Sanely considered, the term *etymology* designates the earliest known or hypothetized meaning—merely a meaning with an early time-index. One should not give it any authority in considering present-day usage but should depend on an analysis of contexts that have synchronic situational indices. As a modifying consideration, the re-enactment of earlier situations through the medium of written records or oral tradition is a factor in the analysis of present-day meaning. The speculation about meaning and 'etymology' for the period before relatively full contexts are available is pretty much a waste of time.

The process of re-abstraction, in one direction or another, in varying frequencies, results in 'change of meaning'. The 'area' (or 'scatter') of meaning of a word-form is not necessarily unified, since obsolescence (i.e. a relative frequency approaching zero) in some parts may have resulted in the isolation of certain 'senses'. But standard lexico-graphical practice tends to give meanings an artificially codified appearance. In the compilation of the *Oxford English Dictionary,* the meanings were analyzed on the basis of large collections of evidence, but then the intermediate or transitional quotations were discarded as being 'ambiguous' or 'not clear'. This results in·a false picture, for actual usage often does not conform to the neat patterns there displayed.[10]

A grave danger in dealing with words is to regard a word as a receptacle into which a meaning is poured. This is a false elementalistic outlook. A word, as established in the social framework, can be regarded as having several aspects or dimensions, all of which are present at one time. A full semantic description of a word involves at least four aspects or dimensions: 'phonology' (the particularization of the word-form), 'syntax' (the relation of word-forms one to another), 'lexicon' (the relation of the word-form to what it is used to represent or symbolize), and 'pragmatics' (the relation of

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[10] Existing dictionaries can well be consulted for revising gross departures from the norm. A certain number of people scattered over the Middle West use the word *urban* as referring to the country rather than the city. This arises, I believe, from the word *interurban,* for a trolley-car that runs through the country: they ignore the directive force of the *inter* component and assume that *urban* applies to the rural surroundings. I discovered a graduate student in sociology at a large Middle Western university who had worked several months on a thesis concerning 'urban problems', which he interpreted as 'rural problems'. One would think that his reading must have yielded peculiar effects; but he did not believe me and became angry when I told him the usual meaning of the word. If enough people held the view of this student, it would become a factor in communication, but at present such a sense is a 'sport'.

the word-form to the people who are communicating).[11] A quoted sentence is only part of a context, for a full context involves the total evaluational processes of the people communicating. For the most part in this particular project only lexicon, together with pragmatics on occasion, will be dealt with, in order to simplify the task.

In a semantic description, the lexical component (the relation of the word-form to what it represents) may be said to be multi-dimensional. The word not only occupies an 'area' of meaning, designating the range of situations or things to which it relates, but also it has a third dimension in the order of abstraction it represents (in the context of each particular use). Unfortunately there seems to be no way of constructing an objective scale by which the orders of verbal abstraction may be gauged.[12] The best that can be done at present is to point out the fact in general terms, and it must be caught in the manner of a visualization or an 'insight'. What is important is the consciousness of the process.[13]

The pragmatic aspect of a semantic description is not separable from the other aspects, but the term may be used to designate such features as the 'social prestige' accompanying the word, the scale of 'popular-learned' character, the geographical scatter, etc. Such matters have much to do with arousing the 'emotions' ('poetic', 'patriotic', 'sexual', 'fear'-ridden, etc.) which previous instances of use have generated and which, through association, cling to the word when it is used again. I avoid here the word *connotation*, inasmuch as the making of a sharp contrast between 'connotation' and 'denotation' introduces a two-valued judgment. 'Connotation' represents the abstracting of a complex of features (chiefly in the pragmatic dimension) different from the set abstracted for 'denotation'.[14]

Terms that designate structural relations rather than objects must be applied elastically enough so that they alter with the relations that they represent. Such *multiordinality,* as it is called, at first blush seems like sloppy ambiguity, but it is a necessary adjustment to relations that vary according to context. These multiordinal terms will require special pains in the compilation of the proposed *Guide.* As an example we may take the word *honor* in an Associated Press dispatch of 1941 from Syria: 'French officers who capitulated to the forces invading Syria expressed sympathy with

[11] The term *pragmatics* is adopted from Charles W. Morris, in *Foundations of the Theory of Signs, International Encyclopedia of Unified Science,* Vol. I, No. 2 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1938), pp. 29-42, although he uses *semantics* where I have used *lexicon.* The importance of this dimension can be gathered from the writings of George H. Mead, especially his *Mind, Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1934), pp. 160-161, 253-260.

[12] As Korzybski says, *op. cit.,* p. 434: 'As to "orders of abstraction", we have no possibility of ascertaining the "absolute" order of an abstraction.'

[13] This is certainly fundamental in Korzybski's outlook, and he devotes several chapters to it, *op. cit.,* pp. 371-451. He states, p. 483, that one of the aims of education is to develop the ability of passing to higher and higher abstractions. Therefore it is astonishing to find that Margaret M. Bryant and Janet Rankin Aiken, in their *Psychology of English* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), twice, pp. 4 and 222, list Korzybski as being opposed to abstraction. This mistake probably springs from dependence upon the misleading summary by Stuart Chase, in *The Tyranny of Words* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1938), where the slogan 'find the referent' beclouds the more complex elements of the theory of general semantics.

[14] The term *connotation* is often applied in an elementalistic way, as if a word has not only a 'meaning' but also a 'connotation' added to it, to delight or to mislead the hearer. But a word in any context has its effect as a whole in producing its responses.

the British cause and hatred of Germany. Asked why, then, they fought the Allied forces, they replied: "We have to do our duty and clear our honor before coming over." ' [15] In this instance actual deaths were caused, both for the French and the British, by the semantic blockage over the word *honor*. The French admitted that the best interests of France lay in an alliance with the British, and hence 'honor', on this high level of abstraction, would entail co-operation with the British; but on a lower level of abstraction, relating to simpler situations, the word *honor* is applied to a simple holding of the fort against all comers. These Frenchmen did not discriminate wisely between the levels. The multiordinal character of this term appears with each successive refinement of situation, as, 'My honor requires the honoring of my honor,' or 'the honoring of the honoring of my honor.' The word *word* is a multiordinal term having a much higher range of abstraction than is commonly realized.

Words may also be placed on a descriptive-inferential scale. A training in general semantics permits a person to discount inferential features and to approach the relative 'purity' in abstracting found at the descriptive end of the scale. If some misguided sociologist wrote a scientific treatise entitled, *The Immigration of Wops to the United States*, a student of general semantics could no doubt make the effort to interpret *Wop* simply as 'person of Italian origin'; but general semantics does not give the sociologist *carte blanche* to try an experiment in using such a title. The relatively inferential character of *Wop* has been determined by the repeated experiences of those familiar with our cultural setting. Training in general semantics allows us to rise above the prejudices and obsessions characteristic of ethnic groups; but the denial of the pragmatic aspect of certain words would be a false-to-fact analysis of cultural factors that have produced us.

The inferential character of some words is so strong that they may be called 'stipulative'. They usually entail an attitude (a relatively fixed response-pattern). The following are examples of these stipulative words:

CEASE: 1940 R. Moses in *Life* 14 Oct. 112   Let us suppose now that the President . . . will cease stirring up class hatred and factionalism.

CLUTCHES: 1941 *N. Y. Times* 9 Aug. 5/1 [Dispatch from Berlin:] In short, the German statement complained, no domain of official governmental activities in South and Central America has escaped the 'clutches' of the 'invader from the north.'

CONDONE: 1941 Wm. J. Brush in *N. Y. D. News* 25 April 29/5 It is unfortunate that Mrs. F. D. Roosevelt condones strikes.

CONNIVANCE: 1940 A. Vandenberg in *Wash. Post* 27 Oct. I. 2/1   A third-term President of the United States—nominated by his long and cunning connivance—is not only fatal violation [etc.].

RENOUNCE: 1940 *Wash. Times Herald* 4 Nov. 1/4   He [Willkie] called upon Mr. Roosevelt to 'renounce' his 'distrust of the people of America after his defeat.'

TAINT: 1940 G. S. Whitby in *Ethics* Oct. 1/17   The book is singularly free from the taint of clericalism.

On theoretical grounds it must be admitted that practically any word in the language, even the labels of simple objects, can cause semantic difficulties. The problem therefore arises how to select the word-stock in a semantic guide. As a practical expedient I shall depend on the collecting of illustrative quotations from wide reading in

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[15] New York *Post*, June 11, 1941, p. 1/2.

newspapers, magazines, and books, upon clinical reports of psychiatrists, and upon the recorded experiences of workers in such empirical fields as biology, history, political science, education, etc. Thus the word-list will not be extracted from existing dictionaries, but will be assembled from original collections of passages in which semantic difficulties are found. The result will be only a sampling of the potential material, but it is hoped that the body will be sufficiently large to include crucial words and typical examples of others.[16]

I embarked on this project in the spring of 1940 and in the first two years have assembled over 5,000 illustrative passages. I intend to continue the collecting on the side, in addition to my regular work, for seven or eight years, until I have a collection of about 40,000 quotations, dealing with several thousand words, not exceeding 10,000. Some important words, like *Americanism, fascist, foreigner, liberal, loyal, -monger, progress, propaganda, socialist, subversive*, etc., will have a considerable body of quotations each, while other words will be put in with a warning, on the basis of a single quotation.[17] When the body of 40,000 quotations is in hand, I hope to be able to devote two years to this project exclusively, one for surveying relevant literature, and the second for preparing copy for the printer. Thus it will be ten or twelve years before the finished *Guide* is available to the public.

On the basis of the meager 5,000 quotations so far collected (out of the projected 40,000), the first hundred and fifty or so words in the letter P for which illustrations have been gathered, in their particular contexts, are as follows:

pachydermous	pander, -er	passel
pacifism, -ist	panic	passion
pack (a court)	pansy	paste (*v.*)
pact	pantywaist	pastiche
pad (*v.*)	panzer	patchwork
paddle	paper (attrib. for	patent medicine
pagan	'planned')	paternalism
paid columnist	paperhanger (for	pathologue
pain	'Hitler')	patience
painted	pappy [18]	patriot, -ic, -ism
palace	parasite, -ism	patronage
paladin	Parisian	paunchy
palladium	parlor pink	pauper

[16] S. I. Hayakawa recognizes that selection is feasible, in *Language in Action* (Mimeographed ed.; Madison, Wisconsin, 1939), p. 95: 'There are in all our minds, certain key-words of unexamined meaning which can automatically send our thoughts along certain invariable routes.' Cf. also J. R. Firth, *loc. cit.*, p. 40: 'Research into the detailed contextual distribution of sociologically important words, what one might call *focal* or *pivotal* words, is only just beginning.' Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 67, 69. Oliver L. Reiser has written in *Tomorrow*, I (February, 1942), 37: 'As examples of words standing in need of what is now termed semantic analysis, we may cite such terms as "liberty", "rights", "fascism", "toleration", "spirit", "soul", "aggression", "adequate defense", "Americanism", and the like.'

[17] Professor Kemp Malone assembled over 1500 quotations for his study of one word, 'On Defining *mahogany*,' *Language*, XVI (Oct.-Dec., 1940), 308-318. He thinks that about 1000 passages would be 'a body of material large enough to make a sound basis for a scientifically accurate definition of the word' (p. 309). This is the counsel of perfection, as he admits; in the end the practical lexicographer brings into play a general 'experience'.

[18] As in the Texas slogan, 'Pass the biscuits, pappy.' Such paraforms as 'passel' (below) for 'parcel', 'holler' for 'hollow', etc., have an independent semantic character. Being 'agin the government' is much different from being 'against the government'.

palmy days
pamper
panacea
parochial
partisan
party line
paymaster
peace
peace offensive
peanut politician
Pearl Harbor
peasant, -ry
peculiar institution
    (for 'slavery')
peddle, pedlar
peek
peel (for 'unclothe')
peninsula
people
pepper
percolate
perfection, -ist
performance
performer
perfume (v.)
perish
perjury
permissive
pernicious
perpetrate, -or
perpetual
perpetuate
persecute
person, -age, -al,
    -ality
persuade
perversion
pervert (n. and v.)
pet
petticoat rule
petulant
phantom
Ph. D.

Philistinism
philosopher, -y
phony
phooey
phrasemonger
pick on
picket
Pickwickian
pictorial
picturesque
pie (in the sky)
pilfer
pillar
pillory
pimp
pincers
pink (n. and adj.)
pinko
pink tea
pinpoint
pioneer
pious
pirate, -ical
pitch (into one)
plague
plain American
plan (n. and v.)
planet, -ary
platform
play, -er
play ball (v.)
playboy
playing field
    (of Eton)
playmate
pleasure
plight
plod
plot (n. and v.)
plough under
pluck
plug
plum-thirsty

plunder
plutocracy, -at,
    -atic
pocket-sized
poet, -ry
pogrom
poison (n. and v.)
poison pen
polemic
police force
policeman
polish off
political, -ian,
    -ics
pollute
pomposity
pond (for 'ocean')
pontificate
pony express
pool (vs. billiards)
poor
poorhouse
poor white
pop
pope, -dom, -ery,
    -ish
popularizer
porcupine
pork
pork-barrel
pornography
pose
positive
possessed
possession
possibility
pot-bellied
pot-boiler
pounce
pour
powder puff (attrib.)
power
pox

Sentences that speak of a word as a word represent a summary or generalization of an undetermined number of contexts in which it is used as a symbol. Their value is contingent on the accuracy of the observer, but they may be regarded as a short-cut. Such sentences consciously introduce another order of abstraction, and this increasing of the awareness of abstracting should have a beneficial result. Sample quotations in this class are:

ASSASSINATION: 1940 ELSWYTH THANE *England Was an Island Once* 66 Ever since Sarajevo the word 'assassination' has contained a peculiar terror.

COLONIAL: 1928 ELIZ. BANKS *Remaking of an American* 158 A visiting English-man . . . spoilt everything and made himself hated by referring to Canadians as 'you patriotic Colonials' and calling their country 'our proudest possession.'

COVENANT: 1941 P. W. WILSON in *N. Y. Times Bk. Rev.* 27 April 1/4 Wilson liked the word covenant. It reminded him of a Presbyterian ancestry.

FASCIST: 1941 F. L. SCHUMAN in *Nation* 25 Jan. 111/1 It's no use dismissing Dennis as a 'fascist'. He admits it. His argument must be met on its merits, not by a label.

REGICIDE: 1908 T. D. MURPHY *British Highways & Byways* 120 The man spoke the word 'regicide' as though he felt the stigma that it carries with it everywhere in England, even though applied to the judge who condemned to death Charles Stuart, a man who well deserved to die.

In conclusion I should like to present a series of quotations illustrative of words that cause semantic blockages. It is hoped that the proposed *Guide* will abound with passages of this sort:

ANGLO-SAXON: 1942 *Chicago Defender* [Negro newspaper] 4 April 17/7 New York Times writers who refer to the U. S. as 'We Anglo-Saxons' should see some of the Anglo-Saxons at Forty-seventh and South Parkway.

CIDER: 1870 DAVID MACRAE *Americans at Home* II. 307 I have heard of a deacon who drew rein at a farm-house door on a very hot day. He was offered a glass of cider. 'Cider,' said the deacon ruefully, wiping his hot brow with his pocket-handkerchief. 'No: cider ain't allowed in the pledge. But if you'll call it apple-juice I'll take a drop.'

COMEBACK: 1941 POLA NEGRI in *N. Y. Post* 28 July 1/1 I hate the word 'come-back,' and this is not a comeback. After all, I've been working in Europe all the time. I am thinking of nothing but my work and a really great picture. I belong to my public.

CONSCIENCE: 1939 EDW. MURROW *This Is London* (1941) 56 I talked with those men on the bench for over an hour and I asked them for a definition of conscience and they couldn't give me one. But they all agreed that a British subject should have the right to say what his conscience dictates before he is forced to fight.

DEATH: 1941 B. ATKINSON in *N. Y. Times* 9 March IX. 1/2 It would be easier to respect 'Claudia' as a play if Claudia, her husband and her mother faced the facts candidly, used the ugly word 'death' in its right place and spoke their minds like intelligent people.

DEVIL: 1941 *N. Y. Times* 11 May IX. 4/4 It was forbidden to mention that Charles Coburn was the devil in 'The Devil and Miss Jones,' recently, because the devil is considered bad box office.

DIVORCE: 1940 B. CHETWYND *Town Wife* 237 Of course divorce is a horrid thing to have in one's family, but it would be wonderful, wouldn't it?

INSURRECTION: 1936 Sir ANTHONY JENKINSON *America Came my Way* 283 'This is not a Textile strike.' he [the governor of Rhode Island in 1934] declared, 'but a Communist insurrection.'

LITERATURE: 1940 M. V. HUGHES *London Family between Wars* 81 Another teacher approached me one day after a lecture with a large limply-bound Bible open in her left hand; placing her right hand reverently over it she said, 'I refuse to regard the Bible as literature.' . . . I fancy that 'Literature' in her school had been a water-tight compartment.

REBEL: 1940 R. WESTERBY *Voice from England* 105 We saw how the 'Spanish Government' became the 'Reds,' and how 'The Rebels' and 'The Insurgents,' became the 'Nationalists,' and 'The Anti-Reds.'

SEX: 1927 M. ARLEN *Young Men in Love* 80 Ysabel had all the American woman's capacity for hiding a fierce sensuality behind a puritanical rejection of the word 'sex'.[19]

[19] Cf. also the following report by D. Walker in the N. Y. *Daily News*, Feb. 27, 1941, p. 44/1: 'Raymond Scott features a quintet as part of his orchestra. Actually there are six

men in the group, but Scott objects to calling them a sextet, because he feels it sounds "suggestive".' For other words of related meaning, see the writer's study, 'An Obscenity Symbol,' *American Speech,* IX (December, 1934), 264-278.

SWASTIKA: 1941 GEORGE PAIGE in *N. Republic* 16 June 830/1 It has become fashionable in the past few years 'to fight fascism' merely by 'chasing the swastika'—that is, by hounding the Bund and exposing only crackpot and sensational Nazi groups. Consequently, swastika-chasers have played directly into the hands of Goebbels: it was Hitler himself who decreed it the function of such groups as the Bund to monopolize public attention in order to divert it from the major transmission belts of fascism.[20]

TOILET PAPER: 1934 *Business* in *N. Statesman* 27 Oct. 580 The designer of a new branded toilet paper realised that two problems faced him. First, the embarrassment of women shoppers when demanding 'toilet paper'. . . . A new name—bath-room tissues— receives prominence. . . . The new angle on selling raised sales 50 per cent.

Too much cannot be expected of a mere dictionary, for the best training comes from an awareness of the un-speakable (or silent) levels,[21] but if a dictionary can minimize the 'is' of identity, display the variation of contexts, and point out the differing levels of abstractions, it should be a means of transforming our reactions to words, *i. e.* from the lower nerve centers that take care of the ordinary flow of speech to the higher nerve centers, where conditionality of response can be introduced. Thereby fixed patterns of response to certain verbal stimuli can be reshaped and re-formed. Many people regard the 'language' as a strait-jacketed affair, covered by a dictionary and a book of grammar, but an informal 'guide', such as that here described, should help to restore a sense of freedom. Even before the proposed work is available, the recognition of the need of it should act as a corrective in the use of existing dictionaries and should help to clarify an area of linguistic theory.

[20] Similarly the raising of Hitler into a personal devil (while delusively effective on an infantile plane) is a semantic disturbance that deflects attention from important structural matters—the impossibility of sane living within the fascist organization of society.

[21] Korzybski, *op. cit.,* pp. 476-478.