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Construction and Loss of the Semantic Fields

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Abstract: The formation of a semantic field implies the opening of an area of sense in the existence of human beings related to the social, political, religious, professional, playful, etc. The more semantic fields cover an individual, the more they expand his links with the world, his relation with the other and the understanding of reality under which the semantic fields are conceived. Each implies the arrest of an epistemological field. However globalization, the impact of monoculture, the loss of space, and the adoption of areas or common places, decreases substantively the semantic fields and individuals integrated into the dominant masses, a consequent loss of their semantic fields. The foregoing means an impoverishment not only of vocabulary, but also of reasoning, which would be limited to a shortage of concepts for thinking, expressing thought, engaging disquisitions and, more painfully, assuming a critical attitude towards mundane circumstances. The inadequacy of semantic fields, or their reductionism to environments of exaltation or passion, marginalizes the possibilities of reflection and imagination by limiting the intellect to superficiality.

Keywords: Semantic Fields, Sense, Worldview

Introduction

IN SEMANTIC FIELDS and the disciplines from which they emerged, and in the artful mixture of affirmations belonging to different levels of knowledge that allude to formalisms and to the purely operational sense, with the loss of the eidetic[1] sense, based on which apparently innovative theories are claimed to be sustained, much care is put into keeping quiet about the phenomena that lead to a process which, as described, confirms that the dream of the spontaneous generation is still established deep within the conscience of numerous thinkers. Similarly, great effort is put into avoiding any reference to the ideological structure in which that process is inserted based on the also hidden supposition that today, as was the case thirty years ago, ideologies are dead.

Altogether and with absolutely no regard to semantic fields that are deeply rooted in the theories that originated them, neither through logic nor intelligence, modernization and resistance are presented as *causes* of the current situation, and we are surreptitiously made to think that, once the former is perfected and the latter is defeated, thus establishing a socioeconomic or cultural project, we will reach the objective of overcoming the crisis that burdens the world.

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[1] Bochenski, I.M. *Los métodos actuales del pensamiento*, p. 84

COMMON
GROUND

The Semantic Field and Its Social Impact

The magic of language makes it possible, due to the crisis and the need for change, for *conservatives*, who up until yesterday were progressionists or revolutionaries, to arrive, and for the *conservatives* of yesteryear to become a social vanguard without even blushing. In the past, social struggles and historical demands were tied to those who are nostalgic, those for whom it is impossible to understand change and progress, who are incapable of seeing the future with optimism and of integrating themselves into modernity and the globalizing process.

Due to this subtle alchemy of language, in which "the universe as a whole that signifies itself"[2] is forgotten, concepts and categories transmute their semantic content. In different countries, local variations, combined with the common origin that determines them, signify a deep amnesia of the social processes and of transformation, which gives way, with no resistance whatsoever, to processes of conscience manipulation.

The issue does not lack importance for being – as the simple-minded put it – just a matter of semantics. On the contrary, due to semantics alone, the issue is essential. It concerns the possibility of rational mediation, because every language builds its own *semantic field*,[3] and with it, the manners and specific boundaries of naming, explaining, and understanding the world in which we act.

The conditions of the feasibility of rational knowledge involve the principles and categories that allow *passing* from one semantic field to another, until a *common fundamental semantic field* is established, based on which the truthfulness or falseness of an affirmation of any particular semantic field can be decided.[4]

Denial of the existence of a common semantic field and even of its possibility is not an argument against the possibility of demonstrating the dangers of the social use of *semantic fields*, nor does it prevent noticing the confusion that can be created due to the intertwining of different *semantic fields* in everyday language, both in private conversations as in public debate. In both cases, as philosophers know and other experts sense, language hides thought, and the results are not always predictable or desired.

Dominion through the Semantic Field

Social struggles begin as struggles between (ideological) semantic fields. They begin as a *politics of ideas* aimed at penetrating consciences – territories in which combat is developed–through the introjection of languages that correspond to conceptions of life, that are more or less conscious, which in turn form aspirations, appreciations, and ways of acting that are *imposed* and are shared.

This is what Hegel and Humboldt refer to when they declare that the spirit is objectified through language and that the spirit of nations is formed on the tongue. It is in this environment that *mass media* acquires momentousness and paradoxically becomes a *mass dominion media*, whose efficiency explains why the statement "he who controls the media, rules" be-

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[2] Eco, Umberto. *El signo*, pp. 110.111
[3] The semantic field theory emerged in Germany in the first half of the 20th Century […] G. Ipsen applied the name "field of meaning" (Bedeutungsfeld) to groups of words that are related to one another by their meaning. Benjamín García Hernández. "Desarrollo y perspectivas…", p. 93
[4] The rupture of the unit of knowledge, which involves the rationality of being and thinking, seems to constitute the program to be accomplished, passing the unit effort on to science.

comes an axiom. This power comes from expanding and forming the *dominant semantic field* in a given society. The language that they socialize determines, in general, the terms of every debate, because every *semantic field* generates thinking habits that incorporate the immediacy of words to the immediacy of the reality experienced; thus, reality is words in their immediacy, the language with which facts are identified and confused, with which men communicate.

The most effective artistic expression, due to its depth and drama, of the condition of the contemporary man who is a victim of isolation in times of instant dissemination, is found in the final scene of *The Chairs*, by Ionesco,[5] who had a "special concern for the 'content' of words."[6] In these scenes a mute orator sends a message that has never been written to a nonexistent audience. The global situation, which by mid-century seemed to illustrate Breton's surrealism, nowadays has reached several expressions that are no less dramatic and grotesque than those of the Theatre of the Absurd, as can be demonstrated. We are yet to extract from both conceptions the ethical teaching that inspires them.

The invariable practice of all creators of scientific or philosophic systems – of redefining known terms, pinning down concepts, assigning categories or establishing conceptual relationships – is neither pointless nor arbitrary. It responds to the rational need to define the *semantic field* that their conceptions create; it is inevitable. Therefore, truly new conceptions, in physics and sociology (to name two extremes of scientific rigor) face countless obstacles in order to be understood. They constitute a challenge to the capacity of comprehension and assimilation of new things, even without considering the not-so-elegant parsimony that inhabits circles of knowledge.

The Immediacy of Semantics Fields

The vagueness of the everyday language of immediacy – a non-criticized blend of terms that belong to different semantic fields – creates predicaments in which the possibility of dialogue is, as taught in the biblical myth, as unthinkable as it was in Babel.

Since thought is man's greatest precision instrument and is expressed through words, the first way to reduce its efficacy is through the reduction of vocabulary, which results in the vagueness of terms and, thus, the confusion of reality. If more than 2,000 words are truly required to communicate daily perceptions and emotions, and the language required to name and explain feelings and scientific concepts, values, etc., imports more than 5,000 words from university education, it's not hard to infer what reducing this amount down to 700 words (as occurs in the *media* and in some political circles) would mean.[7]

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[5] "*The Chairs*", a masterpiece of Theatre of the Absurd playwright Eugène Ionesco, combined two aspects; on the one hand, tragedy, with all its deceitfulness and grotesqueness, and, on the other hand, comedy. The play tells the story of an old couple who live isolated from the world, and who, faced with the end of their lives, ask themselves what they have done and what's left to live. Faced with this, the couple summons a reception in their house, which great personalities attend, to convey a message, the only problem being that they only exist in their minds. "Homenaje a Ionesco…"

[6] Darricades, Georges-Michael. "La pérdida del lenguaje".

[7] The greater or lesser development of the lexicon of a specific field does not depend on its classematic amplitude, but on the expressive needs that language meets. B. García Hdz. *Op. cit.*, p. 100

The deliberate reduction of language has no other aim but to reduce the capacity for thinking and conceptualizing, and to establish uniformity in the ambiguity of the *semantic field* that prevails in the conditions set by those who hold power in the *media*.[8]

Based on these considerations, we understand that the task of establishing the nature and dimensions of the crisis begins with the need to identify and pin down the language in which the different manifestations of this crisis are presented.

The language that is being adopted in upper echelons tends to come from other places, especially currents of thought that *reduce* the political language to an economic one or equip politics with theatrical representation: supply, cost, image, protagonist, quota, stage, etc., are words that are indispensable in the prevailing political vocabulary. These words have been coined by the modern political theories that have been popular for more than 25 years in some universities.

This new language is, without a doubt, the language of crisis and it signals a need for change. Its *semantic field* establishes the conditions of all possible approaches, and its broad dissemination through the *media* repeatedly transmits and repeats the message, which is either consciously or unconsciously translated and adapted to everyday life and to the way in which life is understood and assessed by large sectors of the population, who accept it without analyzing or discriminating its semantic content.[9]

In general, the crisis that is being talked about regrettably confuses fundamental structural aspects with practical, incidental and surface problems The deep crisis, the true one, the one that matters and which is avoided, the one that is the result of social processes that in 1982 brought *agents of distortion* to power, only makes sense with the understanding of the *structure* that has been affected and not in relation to derivative and «current» phenomena that, no matter how important they seem in their *immediacy*, belong to the dimension of chronicle and anecdote.

The crisis–the true, deep one–occurs on a structural level. The other type of crisis–the everyday one, the one that occurs due to pure incompetence–although important, is secondary and, therefore, comes from the former. Formulations to approach it lose sight of the background structural aspects, concentrating on surface and incidental ones.

Conclusion

Without understanding the process that leads to crisis, it is not feasible to overcome the immediacy of ideological explanations that tend to justify and defend the imposed model of development, and it is even less feasible to foresee the future in a world where *monoculture* leads to *unidimensionality of thought*, which by necessity leads to its paralysis and to the impossibility of true knowledge.

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[8] Like the application of Shannon's principle on the relationship between redundancy and novelty, for example. Shannon explained that he was interested in discrete information, consisting of sequences of discrete symbols selected within a finite set. Y contributed definitions of redundancy and ambiguity, and also of "information." Jérôme Segal (ed.). *Teoría de la información*, *ingeniería*, *comunicación y criptografía*, s/p.

[9] "Semantic content", "conceptual content", "propositional content" and "cognitive content" are synonymous expression in many contexts. It is a type of content that is directly evaluated in semantic terms (as in having a reference, a sense, truth values, etc.). It's a content made of concepts. Furthermore, it is a content that is identifiable with a certain proposition. It is also a content capable of having cognitive relevance. It implicates differences in the premises, or in the consequences, of our theoretical or practical reasoning. Díaz Nafría, J.M. "Contenido semántico", np

The *imposed semantic field* is extended toward aspects of social life that include schools, radio, television, film, sports, household chores, fashion, music, literature, religious and magical practices and beliefs, etc.[10]

In all these aspects, we can see the assimilation of a complete way of life that is integrated with styles of talking and of thinking that form the image of the *field's semantic subject*. The transfigurations are evident: from book to magazine, from newspaper to television, from nationalism to globalization, from all that is new to all that is, for one reason or another, considered a sign of modernity, as long as it doesn't fall into the circle of science which, as it is well-known, is alien to the social processes and to the fickleness of modernity. As Ionesco affirmed, words have become meaningless sonorous shells; on one hand "words lose their meaning, and on the other, once this occurs, they cease to exist, there are no words, their meaning is lost, language is lost."[11]

The semantic subject of the field of crisis and the need for change are connected in parallel. The image of need comes from the outside, from the same source as that of the field, and responds to its structural characteristics. It was formed in the late 1950s and embodied in the rising middle class–semi–educated, pragmatic, denationalized and depoliticized, alien to the people, and an active member of civil society, a renegade of its history and an enraged critic of transformation processes, of which it is sometimes ashamed. To change or solve the crisis, people must begin with the transformation and expansion of the semantic fields and their contents. Some suggested actions are reading, writing, and varying one's approach to the arts and the history of philosophy. These are some alternatives to begin modifying one's worldview.

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[10] In them, the elements are constant and features of character and action underlie all the semantic fields. *Cf.* Angel Felices Lago. "El campo semántico de los adjetivos…", p. 81

[11] G. Darricades, *Op. cit.*

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Dra. Vilchis Esquivel was the first graphic designer accepted into the Mexican National System of Researchers. She has degrees in graphic design and philosophy, a Master's in communication and graphic design, a PhD in fine arts from the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, a PhD in philosophy from the UNAM, and a PhD Honoris Causa in educational philosophy from the Ibero-American Council of Education in Uruguay. She has been a professor for 32 years in the Postgraduate Program of National School of Visual Arts at UNAM. She is a pioneer in Mexico in the use of digital resources in arts and design and has published 12 books about graphic design and visual arts theory and methodology, the semiotics of non-linear languages, graphic design hermeneutics, and Mexican graphic design history. She has 15 contributions to books, 65 papers, and 18 didactic manuals. She is a professional graphic designer working in Mexico, the USA, Canada, and Greece in firms like BMG Entertainment, Environmental Law Institute, and UNESCO and has won several international awards. She is a visual artist who has had 56 exhibitions in 28 countries. During the years 2002–2006 she was the first female director of the National School of Visual Arts in 250 years.

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