A. J. Greimas' historical lexicology (1945–1958) and the place of the lexeme in his work

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Abstract. In his first research project, Greimas developed and applied new methods in the historical lexicology of modern French. His theoretical articles formulate a sociological approach that analyses vocabulary as a history of culture, illustrated in his two dissertations on fashion in 1830. In the 1980s, from the perspective of his semiotics, Greimas dismissed his early scholarship as failed experiments that taught him what not to do. In the changed epistemological context of the 21st century, the work appears as pioneering research in cultural studies which possesses clear scholarly value. Greimas' philological and lexicological training bore fruit directly and indirectly throughout his career. Two decades before he launched his semiotics, his project for lexicology proposes a semantic methodology, envisions the construction of an organon for the human sciences, and explicitly calls for a multi-generational collaborative enterprise. Like his structural semantics and semiotics, this lexicology entails three inseparable components: epistemological foundations, concrete methodologies, and robust applications. Moreover, a focus on the lexeme characterizes Greimas' structural semantics and persists in his semiotics.

Keywords: history of semiotics; lexicography; linguistic fields; cultural studies

Over the course of five decades, A. J. Greimas successively adopted or developed a number of methodologies. Yet he rarely repudiated an earlier approach, preferring instead to integrate at least elements of the old into the new, or even to maintain the prior perspectives as the lower, utility floors of an expanding edifice reaching ever outwards and upwards. This essay examines his first sustained research project, the work in the historical lexicology of modern French that he conducted for over a decade after World War II. The scholarship he produced in this mode, notably his two dissertations and two theoretical articles, exerted considerable influence on the field for

decades, and remains a rich trove relevant for researchers today. Moreover, the skills he acquired, the perspectives he embraced, and the lessons he learned in elaborating this lexicological work deeply informed his investigations of language, discourse, and culture throughout the rest of his career. A number of strategies that he developed presciently announce defining features of his semiotics, some tacit assumptions that he made later resurfaced as interrogations, while certain positions he took subsequently shifted to opposing views.

The theoretical articles: Mid-century French philology and the new lexicology

Greimas did not seek out lexicology, it came to him. Having elected to study French philology, he had trained in the dialectology, historical phonetics and morphology, as well as cultural and textual arts of Provençal and French, first as an undergraduate in Grenoble under Antonin Duraffour, then as a doctoral candidate in Paris, under Mario Roques, Charles Bruneau, and Robert-Léon Wagner. He chose Bruneau as his major professor, and since the Sorbonne professor had inherited from Ferdinand Brunot the task of bringing the multi-volume *Histoire de la langue française* (*HLF*) up to 1900, he was recruiting students to write theses on the evolution of French during the 19th century, especially its vocabulary (Brunot 1905–1981).

Numerous dissertations in French philology defended under Bruneau and his predecessors at the Sorbonne dating back to the late 19th century offered Greimas a template for his thesis. In keeping with high-cultural views prevalent in the discipline, each study investigates the development of French by concentrating on the production of a respected literary figure, describing the contribution that one or more works by the author made to the idiom. Vocabulary received particular attention: the dissertations identify, list, and analyse the new or non-standard lexemes that occur in the texts, presented as decisive innovations for the evolution of the lexicon. 19th-century writers figure as frequent choices, since the period remained a blank slate compared to earlier eras, and the theses could provide material useful for the volumes of the *HLF* in preparation. The studies generally came out as published monographs as well (e.g., Cressot 1939; Gautier 1951[1947]; Vincent 1916).

While Greimas did indeed defend a thesis on 19th-century French vocabulary, he collaborated with another doctoral student of Bruneau's to develop new methods for analysing the lexicon. He and Georges Matoré met regularly to brainstorm ideas, soon joined by fellow Sorbonne graduate students in French philology. One of the latter, Bernard Quemada, later the editor of the *Trésor de la langue française*, remembered that "in all of the exchanges, Greimas was always the one who provided the soundest

theoretical foundation".[1] Greimas brought particular strengths in philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, and demonstrated a firm grasp of historical and dialectical materialism (Quemada 2006[1982]: 208–212).

Greimas and Matoré outlined their proposals in a two-part theoretical article published in 1948 and 1950, and illustrated elements of their ideas in their respective dissertations. Whereas the previous Sorbonne theses described themselves as contributions to the history of the French language in general, the title and the body of Greimas and Matoré's *La méthode en lexicologie* explicitly call for an autonomous discipline of *lexicology*, the "science of vocabulary" (Greimas, Matoré 1948: 417; 1950: 208, 210, 212). The essays function as a one-two punch: the 1948 salvo concentrates on critiquing the traditional approach, at times in polemical tones, while the longer 1950 piece outlines alternative methods.

The 1948 article charges the conventional philological studies with three interrelated counts. First, the notion that literary authors dominate the evolution of a language represents an "erroneous conception": lexicologists should invert the process, and "study the vocabulary of the era first, and only then try to determine the originality represented by the lexicon of an author" (Greimas, Matoré 1948: 412–413). Scholars should read widely and analyse a host of period documents, rather than focusing on a single writer.

Second, Greimas and Matoré contest the traditional criteria for selecting words. The earlier studies concentrate on neologisms, defined as lexemes whose written or spoken *forms* appear for the first time in the language. "Hypnotized by the *external* appearance of words", they ignore "*neologisms of meaning*", whereas since it functions as "a reflection of the gradual evolution of ideas, feelings, etc.," the lexicon is renewed more "by semantic development" than by the creation of new words (Greimas, Matoré 1948: 414). Moreover, given that virtually all of an author's central and characteristic lexemes escape the attention of the theses focused on irregularities, the scholars "transform vocabulary study into a contribution to teratology" (Greimas, Matoré 1948: 415), failing to provide an adequate lexical portrait of a writer, let alone that of a period or movement.

Third and last, the Sorbonne dissertations present their vocabulary in lists organized either alphabetically or by morphological criteria. Inversely, given that the objective of "the science of vocabulary […] is to study the meaning of words", in order to constitute itself "as an independent discipline", lexicology must develop "classification procedures" which result in "synthetic constructions" (Greimas, Matoré 1948: 417). Rejecting the existing Sorbonne model, the 1948 article thus calls for a lexicology that investigates common linguistic usage more than literary style, analyses a broad corpus and not just an individual writer, and generates synthetic and explanatory semantic descriptions instead of alphabetically or morphologically based inventories.

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1   Bernard Quemada, letter to the author, 22 November 2010. My translation from the French, T. B. Translations appearing in the article are by the author, unless indicated otherwise.

The search for methods focused on lexical meaning drew Greimas and Matoré into the realm of linguistic semantics. Three established French traditions awaited them there: cognitive, natural-scientific, and sociological, all three focused on the diachronic variation of individual words' significations. Michel Bréal (1897) and Arsène Darmesteter (1887) identified psychological and rhetorical operations that account for the development of restricted, extended, figurative, metaphorical, and metonymic senses of a lexeme.[2] Bréal's approach emphasized cognition, postulating mental processes and emphasizing psycholinguistics, while Darmesteter specified categories immanent to language construed as a living organism, aligning philology with the epistemological principles of evolutionary biology, comparative anatomy, and paleontology. Inspired by Durkheim's analyses of social structure, Antoine Meillet (1958[1906]) developed a methodology which argued instead that words' meanings evolve primarily when their referents undergo changes in the lived environment and its complex web of social subgroups.

For lexicologists in search of "synthetic constructions", two more recent projects in historical vocabulary studies included proposals for investigating coherent sets of words and not just isolated expressions. In the interbellum years, Ferdinand Brunot's mature volumes of the *HLF* showed how transformations in society wrought generalized changes to entire sectors of a lexicon such as the terminologies of finance, the pure sciences, politics, and plastic art. Inspired by Saussure's emphasis on the systematic character of language, Jost Trier elaborated the foundations of structural lexical analyses (Trier 1931; see also von Wartburg 1946).

In their 1950 article, Greimas and Matoré rallied to Meillet's sociological approach, adopted Brunot's strategy of analysing systematic mutations of semantically and socially defined terminologies, and emulated the nascent structuralist perspective and its quest for patterned forms. Their essay proposes a lexicology defined as the "sociological study" of vocabulary that delineates "the history of society" (Greimas, Matoré 1950: 208, 210, 212). By tracking the appearance and disappearance of words and their shifts in sense and frequency, the lexicologist can identify transformations in technology and economics as well as trends in beliefs, sensibility, and manners.

Taken together, Greimas and Matoré's two articles define four distinct types of research projects: studies in "historical lexicology" trace the evolution of an individual concept or a word, while those in "descriptive lexicology" present a "global view" of the lexical phenomena at a particular period, effecting a lexicographic "*analysis*" or exhaustive examination of the vocabulary materials. Once a number of descriptive analyses become available, lexicologists can undertake comparative studies of the lexicons of two different periods or social groups, confronting their architectures.

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2   Although they rarely cite German-language research as methodological models, Bréal and Darmesteter seem to build on Germanic precedents, beginning with Reisig 1839.

Following the Prague School, Greimas and Matoré distinguish their descriptive methodology from the synchronic perspective defined in the *Cours de linguistique générale* (Saussure 1916): since the best "static and descriptive study [...] must begin with the moment at which a certain number of neologisms appear, [...] the distinction proposed by Saussure between the *dynamic* and the *static* and adopted by most linguists needs to be corrected. For us, a vocabulary description cannot ignore the historical point of view" (Greimas, Matoré 1950: 220–221; cf. Thèses 1929). Finally, mature and advanced lexical investigations of a "synthetic" character entail dialogues with research in other fields. Compared to lexicographic descriptions, these more ambitious *lexicological* studies narrowly defined will "form part of a body of knowledge encompassing sociology, psychology, and the different branches of history". Emphasizing synthesis and comparisons, this "*lexicology*" will "play an important role" in the methodological exchanges, transdisciplinary collaboration, and future "synthetic science" called for by researchers in the human sciences (Greimas, Matoré 1950: 210–211, 221).

The theory and methodology for analytical lexicography, or descriptive studies, rely extensively on traditional philology and lexicography grounded in the dominant episteme of positivistic erudition, which Greimas and Matoré assume as a given. Inversely, the synthetic lexicology requires an explicit articulation of novel methods and epistemological principles. Referencing Henri Berr, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Jules Romains – but not Saussure – the co-authors foreground the contemporary transdisciplinary "trend to grasp facts in their totality and no longer solely in their individual nature" (Greimas, Matoré 1950: 211, n9). "What is a vocabulary? It is an organic and hierarchical set of words expressing a certain state of civilization" (Greimas, Matoré 1950: 221). Lexicology must thus respond to three critical questions: how one "set of words" changes into a new configuration, how any such set can be described, and how lexemes are related to a "state of civilization". The authors' proposals privilege two interrelated strategies: classification rooted in rationalism, and functional wholes redolent of the new structural linguistics and more distantly of the natural sciences and Romanticism (e.g., Cuvier, Goethe). Innovative applications in proto-structuralist lexicology (Trier 1931; von Wartburg 1946) and in historiography (Berr 1921; Bloch 1983[1939], 1949; Febvre 1942; Febvre *et al.* 1930) inform their appropriation of both avenues.

In the first, classificatory mode, the 1950 article tentatively proposes a diachronic schema paired with a bare-bones synchronic "rational classification" (Greimas, Matoré 1950: 210–211, also see 1950: 217, 219). Historical change is modelled not as gradual evolution, but as a series of radical transformations that intervene rhythmically with the advent of a privileged generation (Greimas, Matoré 1950: 214). At each moment, Saussure's opposing tendencies of *intercourse* and *provincialism* govern the tension between alteration and conservation (Greimas, Matoré 1950: 216). Combining an approximate time span with a socio-psychological motivation, the notion of a generation

fosters the investigation of systematic lexical change, complementing the traditional procedure of assigning a date to each individual lexeme.

The 1950 manifesto incorporates two ideas already advanced in the 1948 article in order to envision global semantic classifications. First, with an implicit nod to Ferdinand Brunot's essay "*Les mots témoins de l'histoire*" ["Words witnesses to history"], the authors propose the concept of '*mots-témoins*' ('witness-words') (Brunot 1928). In a corpus, the lexicologist will identify "a certain number of significant words characterizing the technical, economic, intellectual, and moral state of the society […] using these *witness-words,* we can construct a chart that encompasses the whole of the vocabulary at a given time" (Greimas, Matoré 1948: 417). Whether neologisms of form or meaning, witness-words point to key areas of lexical and social development, and establish the cultural specificity of each lexicon.

The co-authors also borrow the notion of 'linguistic fields' ('*Sprachfelder*') from Trier and other Germanic philologists. In this framework, the witness-words of a given lexicon define the vocabulary components which cluster to form "an organized set" or "*linguistic field*" (Greimas, Matoré 1948: 417). Each such field occupies a position within the overall lexical system structured by three fundamental dimensions: the technical domain comprises the terminologies of the trades, aesthetic activities, and sciences in a society; the cognitive sector incorporates the common, non-technical vocabulary of psychic functions; while the pragmatic or "social" dimension designates usages such as working-class discourse, slang, familiar speech, and academic style. Smaller '*notional fields*' subdivide these initial skeletal frameworks. Once researchers establish an overall semantic topology, they can define each descriptive lexicographic project with respect to its "surface" and duration, ideally targeting a time that corresponds to one of the cusps identified in the historical framework (Greimas, Matoré 1950: 217–220).

In the second, functional mode, Matoré and Greimas (1950: 220) consider a vocabulary "a coordinated whole". Numerous witness-words point to a handful of key features, including new worldviews and socio-economic developments, and also salient social types together with their respective ideologies. For the 1825–1833 period studied in the authors' dissertations, three social actors play a central role that can recall that of Eugen Weber's "ideal type": the bourgeois, the dandy, and the artist (Greimas, Matoré 1950: 215). The integrated whole constituted by the early 19th-century trends evinces a dramatic, agonistic character: the social types circulate and struggle within a common society and world view characterized by innovation, expansion, and progress.

Whereas the horizons of the 1948 essay largely remain circumscribed by the venerable traditions of French philology, the 1950 installment incorporates extensive elements of the newer "linguistic" paradigm. It quotes and discusses Saussure as well as his successor in general linguistics in Geneva, Charles Bally – but consistently describes language as intimately tied to non-linguistic social reality, and not relegated to its

own immanent sphere, as in the *CLG* (Saussure 1916: 97). The essay also ventures beyond language studies into other fields to tackle general theoretical issues, quoting Claude Bernard, Henri Berr, Durkheim, and Sartre, and referring to Marx, Spengler, economists, psychologists, and historians of ideas. The *Annales* School supplies the article's most consistent and confident references outside the language arts.

Given the variety of lexical studies envisioned and the complexity of French society and vocabulary throughout history, the lexicology called for by Greimas and Matoré represents an immense collective enterprise. Elsewhere, Greimas suggests that a single sector of the lexicon requires twenty painstaking "dirty lexicography" analyses, seconded by twenty studies synthesizing those results; only after fifty years of preparatory analytical investigations would comparative projects become possible (Greimas 1958: 111–112, 1991[1949]: 342). An infinite number of such comparative as well as "historical" studies could complement the work on a given sector. The authors adumbrate an ambitious science that aims at an exhaustive knowledge of French culture and vocabulary, a project which would occupy squadrons of scholars for as long as they chose to continue. Greimas and Matoré propose that the French *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* coordinate the vast collaborative venture (Greimas, Matoré 1948: 419).

With over a half-century of hindsight, it is easy to find fault with the lexicological manifestos. Their articulation of synthetic wholes remains exploratory, offering less a "method" as promised in the title than a hypothesis and theoretical principles, inspired in part by trends in neighbouring disciplines. From a contemporary perspective, one can argue that neither the social fabric nor the processes that transform it function in unison to the extent suggested by the essays, composed in an intellectual context under the sway of Hegel and Marx. The disregard for the "*external* appearance of words" in favour of an exclusively semantic definition of lexemes obfuscates the crucial role that the former plays in establishing the scientific character of the research: the words' sensible dimension, together with their inscription in texts to which a defined historical status is assigned, constitutes lexicology as an investigation grounded in demonstrable facts.

Despite such drawbacks, scholars widely recognized the principles advanced in Greimas and Matoré's twin methodological articles as important formulations of the new avenues in French lexicology. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, other Sorbonne students produced dissertations and monographs which developed and applied methods along the lines sketched in the two essays, including K. J. Hollyman (1957[1950]), Bernard Quemada (1949, 1955), Stewart Scoones (1976[1951]), and Peter Wexler (1955[1951]). In 1953, Matoré published a slim monograph under the same title, *La méthode en lexicologie*, which reaffirms and develops the proposals in the essays. For at least three decades, French lexicologists would cite the principles outlined in this handbook (and introduced in the co-authored articles) as central to research in the field (e.g., Guiraud 1972: 73–93; Picoche 1971: 91–94; Rey 1968).

The dissertations: The vocabulary of Restoration fashions

Defended in 1946, Matoré's thesis on the style of Théophile Gautier's prose from 1833 to 1845 retains many features of the traditional Sorbonne philological mold. Yet the study already innovates by identifying characteristics that typify the whole of the writer's vocabulary and not just its novel elements, and by explaining those distinctive features by tying them to the political, economic, and cultural trends of the period, the July Monarchy. The thesis selects several lexical domains for ampler description, focusing on semantics, and broadens its horizon to refer to a significant number of period works and to wide-ranging contemporary scholarship in the human sciences.

Composed before or concurrently to the methodological manifestos, the two dissertations that Greimas defended in December 1948 radically depart from the established Sorbonne template for French philology, and develop alternative perspectives sketched in the co-authored methodological essays. Rather than investigate a single literary work or author, the theses examine the vocabulary of stylish apparel in 1830 France by analysing a corpus of fashion magazines, complemented by memoirs, travel literature, conduct manuals, and fiction and essays by Balzac and other writers. Instead of focusing on neologisms or non-standard expressions, the studies target the entire lexicon of fashion, identifying over three thousand lexemes and discussing them in extended expositions.

In the terminology of the methodological articles, Greimas' main dissertation exemplifies a "descriptive" analysis, while his complementary thesis provides a brief but suggestive example of a "synthetic" study based on the same corpus. The principal dissertation, *La mode en 1830: essai de description du vocabulaire vestimentaire d'après les journaux de modes de l'époque* [*Fashion in 1830: An attempt at a description of clothing vocabulary based on the fashion magazines of the period*], undertakes a novel descriptive study. The comprehensive investigation of a coherent and contemporaneous set of phenomena fosters synthetic constructions as advocated in the methodological articles. The thesis foregrounds a semantic perspective and sketches a structural and diacritical conception of lexemes. In a move that will surprise scholars familiar with Greimas' semiotics, he formulates a methodology founded in a realism diametrically opposed to the immanent perspective articulated in the *CLG*. Whereas the latter brackets the non-verbal world, the dissertation resolves "to stay as close as possible to things, to take as a starting point the world of realities and not that of words" (Greimas 2000a[1948]: 7, see also 132–133). The principal thesis represents a hybrid text, part essay on Restoration fashions, part expository dictionary of terms, the preparation of which entailed an intensive apprenticeship in lexicography.

Contrary to studies by Barthes (1967) and by Kroeber and Richardson (1940) that construct fashion largely as a self-contained phenomenon which follows its own quasi-

universal laws, *La mode en 1830* systematically argues that sartorial vogues form an integral component of broader social trends. Two central dynamics predominate: the relations among social classes in post-Revolutionary France, and the rivalry between Neo-classicism and Romanticism. In the wake of the democratization of society since 1789 and a France freed from sumptuary laws, élite Restoration men and women resorted to nuances of adjustment rather than to ostentatious markers in order to signify their status through costume. Similarly, the duel between Romantics and Neo-classicists which exploded in the battle of *Hernani* in 1830 also gave rise to contrasting fashions for both sexes, from hair styles and jewelry to cravats and sleeves. The elegant attire functions as signs of subgroup distinctions within a period dress code.

The much shorter secondary thesis, *Quelques reflets de la vie sociale en 1830 dans le vocabulaire des journaux de mode de l'époque* [*Reflections of 1830 social life in the vocabulary of fashion magazines from the period*] illustrates the kinds of "synthetic" studies that could exploit the voluminous information amassed in *La mode en 1830*. *Quelques reflets* focuses its exposition on social developments signalled by a dozen particularly significant neologisms of form or meaning, treating the words as "witnesses of history", including '*haute société*' ('high society'), '*distinction*' ('distinction'), the rehabilitated epithet '*gothique*' ('Gothic'), '*romantisme*' ('Romanticism'), and the English loan words '*confortable*' and '*dandy*' (Greimas 2000b[1948]: 295–296). These neologisms and numerous others which they subsume point to three decisive trends that impinged on Restoration fashion and its vocabulary: technological and economic innovations, Romanticism, and Anglomania.

Repudiating the established Sorbonne framework, Greimas' twin dissertations elaborate and illustrate new research strategies that generate vast quantities of original lexical documentation, analyse common linguistic usage, focus on semantics, identify general trends, and explore the interface between vocabulary and society. Through their corpus and their approach, the two theses prefigure contemporary cultural studies; indeed, along with *De l'imperfection* (Greimas 1987), they appear as his works whose thrust and voice align most readily with today's intellectual context. Charles Bruneau declared that Greimas' dissertations would "serve as landmarks in the history of French lexicology and indeed in general lexicology",[3] judgments echoed by Robert-Léon Wagner, Matoré, and Quemada.

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[3]   Bruneau, Rapport de soutenance de thèse, Archives Nationales de France–Paris, AJ/16/7103, *s. a.* [December 1948?].

Aftermath: The role of the lexeme in Greimas' work, or change and continuity

Greimas' relocation to Alexandria, Egypt, in late 1949 threatened to curtail his research programme in the erudite lexicology outlined in the co-authored articles and illustrated in his theses, which depended on access to the *Bibliothèque nationale* or a comparable collection. Yet the few articles that he published in the 1950s trace a continued commitment to analysing the history of French vocabulary and to integrating the field into contemporary linguistics and human sciences (Greimas 1952, 1955, 1956, 1959; Greimas, Matoré 1957). In the later 1950s, he became increasingly interested in developing methods aligned with Prague and Copenhagen structural linguistics, and sought procedures that could favour the construction of models, foreground the systematic character of language, and increase the objective character of analyses. The postwar lexicology elaborated with Matoré successfully highlighted cultural transformations, but remained in search of formal models and robust analytical linguistic procedures. Notably, the identification of witness-words and of key semantic features in a lexicon remained relatively subjective procedures (Greimas 1958). The pursuit of meaning within the structuralist paradigm also led Greimas to investigate the syntagmatic dimension, to study the organization of discourse and to identify syntactic structures, strategies utterly foreign to his postwar lexicology.

At first blush, one may be tempted to consider that the research that Greimas produced as of the 1960s effects a clean break with his early lexicological scholarship. He himself emphasized the discontinuity, reporting that "lexicology revealed itself to be a dead end" (Greimas 2006[1982]: 127), and asserting that the sign – including the lexeme – "institutes an unusable level of reality that is irrelevant for scientific description" (Greimas 1970: 110, see also 1966: 31). Yet in spite of the contrasts, striking parallels between his early and later research stand out. Twenty years before he launched his *séminaire de Sémantique générale* at the *École des hautes études pratiques*, his lexicological project shares three salient features with his semiotic project as it would develop: both espouse a semantic perspective, aim at the construction of a transdisciplinary organon, and require a collective, multi-generational effort. And like his structural semantics and semiotics, Greimas' lexicology entails three inseparable components: epistemological principles, concrete methodologies, and robust applications. In addition, his attacks on the existing philological approach focused on the uniqueness of individual authors and his arguments for studying more common linguistic usage portend his life-long focus on the social, at times in conflict with many of his contemporaries' disdain for "doxa". This stance would later differentiate his work from that of his partner in the "semiological adventure", Roland Barthes. His collaboration with Matoré also prefigured in certain respects that which he would develop with Barthes: in both cases, an *esprit*

de géométrie Greimas paired with a more *esprit de finesse* confederate, forging a dyad that accomplished goals which neither one could have realized alone.

At the same time, a number of issues that lurked as unquestioned assumptions in the lexicological project later emerged as question marks. Most notably, whereas scholars of Greimas' generation adopted historical methodologies as a matter of course in their formative years, the nature and role of diachronic perspectives came under question within the structuralism of the 1960s that privileged synchrony. In essays that enjoyed relatively little resonance, Greimas stubbornly continued to reflect on how to undertake historical inquiry within a changing epistemological context (Greimas 1970: 103–115, 1973, 1976, 2017[1964]).

Most importantly perhaps, a focus on the word and its relation to the text would continue to characterize much of Greimas' work throughout his career. After publishing *Sémantique structurale*, he brought out two dictionaries that apply skills he learned in his philological and lexicological training: the *Dictionnaire de l'ancien français* [*Dictionary of Old French*, 1968], his most widely used (and sold) book ever by far, followed over two decades later by the *Dictionnaire du moyen français* [*Dictionary of Middle French*, 1992] co-authored with Teresa Keane Greimas, the last book that he completed during his lifetime. Both works required years of concentrated effort, and remain the standard desktop reference works for their respective languages even today.

Furthermore, if one compares Greimas' influential *Sémantique structurale* to other linguistic milestones of the era such as Benveniste (1966–1974), Chomsky (1957, 1965), or Dubois (1965, 1967), his essay remains unique in that it defines its key concepts and methodologies primarily in relation to the word, rather than to the sentence or to constituent sounds. Semic analysis, the study of '*tête*' ('head'), the sememe, the constructed sememe, and isotopy all radiate out from the locus of the lexeme. Even the seminal chapter that develops a narrative model derived from Vladimir Propp adopts *Morphology of the Folktale*'s lexematic formulation of the thirty-one functions as its starting point, rather than analysing their main, propositional articulations – which would have required a more complex syntactic analysis that takes account of the actants entailed in each function (Greimas 1966: 193–203; cf. Propp 1968[1958]: 25–65). Similarly, the last chapter's textual investigation of Bernanos's "imaginary universe" takes the form of a lexical analysis (Greimas 1966: 222–256). And if the realism that *La mode en 1830* formulates as its theoretical perspective stands at antipodes from the epistemological choices of *Sémantique structurale*, the two strategies share the conviction that the search for meaning can start with the word, but necessarily leads to other instances. In both cases, complex dynamics on an immanent plane underpin the shimmering surface of signs: the dissertation's "perpetual mobility of things" and "living reality" gives way to layered structures of signification (Greimas 2000a[1948]: 132–133).

The focus on the word did not disappear once Greimas widened his perspectives to explore semiotics. In the 1970s and 1980s, when he proposed that his research group take the then highly unconventional step of investigating emotions, he himself proceeded by undertaking a series of lexical analyses of '*l'amour*' ('love'),[4] '*la colère*' ('anger'), '*la nostalgie*' ('nostalgia'), and '*l'avarice*' ('avarice') (Greimas 1983[1981]: 225–246; Greimas, Fontanille 1991: 111–187). He justified the strategy: "lexemes are notorious for often appearing as condensations which, if one takes the trouble of analyzing them, conceal very complex discursive and narrative structures" (Greimas 1983[1981]: 225). Greimas adapted Jakobson's concept of intersemiotic translation in order to reconcile an immanent perspective with the autonomy of non-verbal phenomena. As of the later 1960s, he placed the semiotics of the natural world on a par with that of the natural languages, and called for comparative and syncretic studies that analyse the imbrication of their distinct architectures in complex cultural practices and productions (Greimas 1970: 49–91; Greimas, Courtés 1979: 233–234, 311–313).

Toward the end of his half-century-long love-hate engagement with the word, Greimas described the lexeme in a spiralling dialectic. Naïve "surface site", "place of praxis", and raw given in a first moment, the word becomes the locus that must be circumvented in order to construct scientific models such as seme, sememe, nucleus, and isotopy. Yet envisioning a sphere beyond the boundaries of his structural semantics and early semiotics, Greimas (1989: 58) describes a third moment in which "the word reappears [...] in figurative discourse: literary, poetic, or sacred, [...] when an evanescent, fragile, nascent thought seeks to cling to the sprigs that figure-words at times represent [...] At the horizon of meaning, the word finds its dignity restored". Just as a new form of life may express itself initially in fragmented aesthetic manifestations before taking shape as an ethical structure (Greimas 1993), so too can an inchoative idea latch onto lexemes in order to aid its unfolding, employing familiar words almost like metaphors, those other parturient agents. The adventure first disclosed in patient lexicological research, pursued in two methodological essays, and developed in the expansive *La mode en 1830*, would continue throughout new territories, exploring words and texts for decades.

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4   Jacques Allard, email to the author, 12 August 2014: "*Je me souviens du passage de M. Greimas parmi nous, en particulier de sa communication (une analyse du lexème 'amour'.* ["I remember Mr. Greimas' visit with us, in particular his lecture (an analysis of the lexeme '*amour*'/'love'.)"]

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Историческая лексикология А. Ж. Греймаса (1945–1958) и место лексемы в его исследованиях

В своей первой научно-исследовательской работе Греймас разработал и применил новые методы в исторической лексикологии современного французского языка. В его теоретических статьях сформулирован социологический подход, который анализирует лексику как историю культуры. Это иллюстрируют две диссертации Греймаса о моде в 1830 году. В 1980-х годах он отошел от своих ранних работ, считая их неудачными. Но в изменившемся эпистемологическом контексте 21-го века эти работы выглядят в культурных исследованиях новаторскими, обладающими несомненными академическими достоинствами. Филологическое и лексикологическое образование Греймаса давало прямые и косвенные результаты в течение всей его карьеры. За два десятилетия до начала семиотических исследований Греймас предлагает в своем лексикологическом проекте семантическую методологию, строительство органона для гуманитарных наук, а также призывает к междисциплинарному сотрудничеству. Как и структурная семантика и семиотика Греймаса, эта лексикология включает в себя три неразделимых компонента: эпистемологические основы, конкретные методологии и возможности применения. Кроме того, внимание к лексеме характеризует всю структурную семантику Греймаса и сохраняется в его семиотике.

A. J. Greimase ajalooline leksikoloogia (1945–1958) ja lekseemi koht tema teadustöös

Oma esimeses teadusprojektis töötas Greimas välja nüüdisprantsuse keele ajaloolise leksikoloogia uued meetodid ning rakendas neid. Tema teoreetilistes artiklites sõnastatakse sotsioloogiline lähenemine, mis analüüsib sõnavara kui kultuuriajalugu ja mida illustreerivad tema kaks väitekirja 1830ndate aastate moe kohta. 1980ndatel aastatel taandus Greimas oma varajastest uurimustest

kui ebaõnnestunud katsetustest. 21. sajandi muutunud epistemoloogilises kontekstis osutub tema looming teedrajavaks uurimistööks kultuuriuuringute vallas. Greimase filoloogiline ja leksikoloogiline ettevalmistus kandis kogu tema karjääri vältel vilja nii otseselt kui kaudselt. Kaks aastakümmet enne seda, kui ta tuli välja oma semiootikaga, pakkus tema leksikoloogiaprojekt välja semantilise metoodika, nägi ette humanitaarteaduste organoni loomist ning kutsus otsesõnu üles multidistsiplinaarsele koostööle. Nagu tema strukturaalne semantika ja semiootika sisaldab ka see leksikoloogia kolme üksteisest lahutamatut komponenti: epistemoloogilisi aluseid, konkreetseid meetodeid ja julgeid rakendusi. Lisaks iseloomustab lekseemile keskendumine Greimase strukturaalset semantikat ning jääb püsima tema semiootikas.