Brigitte NERLICH [1]

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF HISTORICAL SEMANTICS: THE CASE OF MIDDLE ENGLISH AND EARLY MODERN ENGLISH SYNONYMS OF GIRL/YOUNG WOMAN by *Grzegorz A. KLEPARSKI,* **The University Press of the Catholic University of Lublin, 1997, pp. 277. ISBN 83-228-0598-5**

There has recently been a revival of interest in historical semantics after it went 'out of fashion' in the 1960s. Historical semantics had its *Golden Period* between 1880, when Hermann Paul published his work *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*, and 1942, when Stephen Ullmann published his article on 'The range and mechanism of changes of meaning' (cf. Warren (1992:1)). Between 1950 and 1960 there was a general decline in interest in this topic brought about by Leonard Bloomfield's "semophobia" (Kleparski (1986:10)) on the one hand, and Noam Chomsky's relegation of semantics to the linguistic underground on the other. During the 1970s and 1980s one could still find sporadic attempts at defining semantic change, but they went generally unnoticed. However, over the last twenty years a gradual re-admission of diachronic semantics into the linguistic main-stream has been noticeable, and over the last few years there have even been attempts at linking modern diachronic semantics to the work done during the *Golden Period* on the one hand and to modern cognitive linguistics on the other. Here the works of Dirk Geeraerts, Gerd Fritz and now Grzegorz A. Kleparski are of special importance (see also Nerlich 1992). All three excel at founding their semantic theories on the exhaustive and meticulous study of well-chosen examples of semantic change, in the case of Kleparski (1997) on the Middle English and Early Modern English synonyms of *girl/young woman*. Reading this thought-provoking book I became very much intrigued by the relation between lexical categories and conceptual categories (which are explored with the examples of the synonyms for *girl/young woman*) – a distinction all too often forgotten by mainstream cognitive linguists.

_____
[1] Dr **Brigitte Nerlich**, Research Fellow, School of Psychology, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, NG7 2RD, UK, e-mail: bn@psychology.nottingham.ac.uk.

How are they linked and which one comes first? Kleparski's (1997) observations in this matter lead me to hypothesise that lexical and conceptual categories are linked via **metaphorical** and **metonymical** processes which are, in a way, the tools that allow us to explore conceptual space with the linguistic material we have at hand. Metonymy allows us to shorten distances between adjoining conceptual spaces, metaphor allows us to build bridges between distant conceptual spaces. But do they actually build up conceptual spaces in the first place, or are at least some conceptual spaces (such as the conceptual space of the human body, the conceptual space established by [*Gestalt*] perception) pre-given? And what is the role of polysemy and synonymy in all this? Again there is a link between them and metaphor and metonymy, polysemy being the result of multiple metaphorical and/or metonymical uses, synonymy limiting this growth to a certain extent. And finally, what is the role of social and cultural influences in all this, as, for example, some synonyms such as *pucelle* or *boor* can only emerge after certain cultural and social events, wars and revolutions have happened. All these are questions which broaden the theoretical and conceptual horizon of historical and cognitive semantics and which are at least **asked** in this book and not just swept under the carpet. This book should therefore be read by those interested in the theory of historical and cognitive semantics as well as by those interested in **how** to study cases of semantic change with the methods provided by traditional historical semantics and by modern cognitive semantics and prototype theory. It should also be of interest to those studying **polysemy** and **synonymy** on the one hand and **metaphor** and **metonymy** on the other.

References

Fritz, Gerd (1998). *Historische Semantik.* Stuttgart; Weimar: Metzler.

Geeraerts, Dirk (1997). *Diachronic Prototype Semantics. A Contribution to Historical Lexicology.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Kleparski, Grzegorz A. (1986). *Semantic Change and Componential Analysis: An Inquiry into Pejorative Developments in English*. Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet Verlag.

Kleparski, Grzegorz A. (1997). *Theory and Practice of Historical Semantics: The Case of Middle English and Early Modern English Synonyms of GIRL/YOUNG WOMAN.* Lublin: The Publishing House of the Catholic University of Lublin.

Nerlich, Brigitte (1992). *Semantic Theories in Europe 1830–1930. From Etymology to Contextuality.* Amsterdam & Philadelphia: Benjamins.

Paul, Hermann (1880). *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte.* Halle a.d.S.: Niemeyer. (2nd rev. ed., 1886; 3rd rev. ed., 1898; 4th rev. ed., 1909; 5th ed., 1920.).

Ullmann, Stephen (1942). 'The range and mechanism of changes of meaning' [in:] *The Journal of English and German Philology,* 61, pp. 46–52.

Warren, Beatrice (1992). *Sense Developments. A Contrastive Study of the Development of Slang Senses and Novel Standard Senses in English*. Stockholm: Amqvist & Wiksell International.