Milestones in the history of lexical theory

A tabular summary, by Patrick Hanks

Philosophy of Language and Logic	Linguistics and Psychology
Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) interested in concepts rather than words; treated language as a vehicle for organizing concepts, not as an object for study in itself - Genus term (e.g. *tree*) vs. specific (e.g. *oak*). - Essential properties (e.g. *all men have backbones*) vs. accidental properties (e.g. *some men are bald*) - Syllogisms (e.g. *Socrates was human; all humans have backbones; therefore Socrates had a backbone)*	**Ancient Greek grammarians** - Inflections and morphology - Parts of speech
Roman rhetoricians **Quintilian (1st century AD)** interested in figures of speech such as metaphor—but not in the theory of word meaning	**Roman grammarians** **Varro (1st century BC)** **Aelius Donatus (4th cent AD)** **Priscian (6th century AD)** Founded modern grammatical theory

Medieval Europe
 	
Important developments in theology and logic—but no advances in understanding words and meanings
 	
Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716)
 	
- Shared Wilkins' desire to 'improve' language
- Necessary and sufficient conditions
 	
    A necessary condition: *If it's a triangle, it will have exactly three sides.*
    A sufficient condition: *It has three sides, so it must be a triangle.*
    [Word meaning in natural language does not really work like this – see Wittgenstein, Rosch below – but many people think that it does, or that it should]
	
	John Wilkins (1614-1672)
	
	Tried to invent a 'perfect' universal language – his "real character" – for clear scientific thinking and international communication
	
	- arranged words in a hierarchical ontology [Forerunner of Roget's *Thesaurus*, 1852]
	- "groping towards the modern concept of hypertext" (Umberto Eco, *The Search for the Perfect Language* [1995])

C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards	**Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)** - Langue vs. parole

- *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923)
- Words relate to objects in the world by mediation in the thoughts of a speaker

  —the relationship is indirect

- Diachronic vs. synchronic
- Word relations: paradigmatic vs. syntagmatic
- Signified and signifier

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951)

- Word meaning as a chain of family resemblances, e.g. the meaning of *'game'*
- Rejects the traditional view [of Leibniz, Frege, and Russell] that sentence meaning is compositional (i.e. that it is put together out of building blocks like a child's Lego set)

  —because word meanings are not static entities like Lego blocks

Hilary Putnam (b. 1926)

- Attack on definition by necessary and sufficient conditions
- 'The division of linguistic labor'

  – I may not be able to define gold, but there must be someone in the linguistic community who can

Saul Kripke (b. 1940)

- Causal theory of reference
- Rigid designators:

  Even if Jonah never went to Nineveh, he is still Jonah

  Even if you sit on a table or use it for firewood, it's still a table

Anna Wierzbicka (b. 1938)

- "A Natural Semantic Metalanguage"

  —based on 64 semantic primitives, which can define all words in all languages (she says)
- Lexicographers should "seek the invariant"
- Wants to preserve the Leibnizian "Lego-set" view of word meaning

Structuralism and word meaning:

see John Lyons' summary.

Semantic field theorists

- Jost Trier (1894-1970): varying terms for knowledge and understanding (*wisheit, kunst, list*) in Middle High German
- Helmut Gipper: *Sessel oder Stuhl*
- Eugene Coseriu (1921-2002): Conceptual structure varies over time independently of lexical structure

Eleanor Rosch (b. 1938)

anthropologist and psychologist

- Prototype theory:
  To use and understand terms in ordinary language, people rely on **comparisons with a cognitive prototype**, rather than on Leibnizian definitions

Igor Mel'čuk (b. 1932)

- Meaning<—>text theory
- Explanatory and combinatorial dictionary
- Lexical functions:

  —a finite set of functions that govern the relation of each word to its

—thus, she disagrees with Wittgenstein	collocates ● Believes in necessary and sufficient conditions for word meaning
	### Charles Fillmore (b. 1929) ● Frame Semantics ● Construction grammar
	### George Lakoff (b. 1941) ● *Metaphors we live by* (with M. Johnson,1981) ● Conceptual metaphor: —our ordinary cognitive processes (thought) are fundamentally metaphorical in nature ● Metaphor is not just decoration

### James Pustejovsky 	
 	
computational linguist
 	
The Generative Lexicon (1995) (GL)
● The meaning of a word is a "lexical conceptual paradigm"
   —it has many facets
   —governed, in part, by "qualia"
 	
● Context affects meaning:
   — "co-compositionality"
	### John Sinclair (1933-2007)
	
	● The corpus revolution
	
	   "Explain what is there, not what might be there"
	
	   "Every different is sense is associated with a difference in form"
	
	● Statistical study of collocations
	
	● An utterance is a sequence of **choices** by a speaker or writer
	
	   —governed by tension between the **idiom principle** and the **open choice principle**