

Categorization of the < SEATS >: Examples of a Domain of Notions in the Lexical Field

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Abstract

In this paper, we organize a micro-world of «objects» (Cf. seats), specified by different kinds of parameters which are categorised in terms of “agentive templates”. We introduce the notion of “network of meaning” to integrate these templates.

I. This paper resumes previous studies, already set in lexicology in the intention to redefine the notion of “referent” in discourse; in others words, the notion of “objects” as pieces of the world (real or imaginary). In this way, it is the definition of the relationship between the “signified” (in Saussurian words: the principle of a linguistic differentiation) and the “referents” as a description of the objects by means of “semic features”. One of the most well-known linguistic studies is Pottier’s work on seats (1963). The linguist introduced the notion of a matrix of combinatorial features in order to describe different types of seats (like *chair*, *stool*, *armchair*,...) according to definitional criterion: with/without back, with/without arms, fixed/folding, one seat/several seats, etc,... these features are denotative criterions by which we are able to characterize the “mental image” of these entities and through which we understand what they are; afterwards, we can introduce them in different kinds of discourse *scenarii*. Similarly, this thematic of the seats appears again in G. Lakoff’s book (1987: 52) who finds once again in Rosch’s analysis of prototype the relevance of the notion of “opposite features”.

II. The analysis that we propose cannot be only a mode of inventory of the *data* (which will be introduced in the creation of *thesaurus*). It has to allow us to build a notion of “representation of knowledge” that we have of these referents; in others words, the setting up of a process which means their cognitive organization; as such, this kind of entity is able to have: a *use* < a chair → for seating >, < a couch → for lying down >; a part of a set (furniture): < a chair → around a table >, < an armchair → in front of a desk >; this piece of furniture can be the subset of a larger set: < a seat → a dining room >, < a seat → a car >, these

two kinds of sets referring to different criterions (a house, a vehicle) that we can categorize at a higher level; a *social status*: for example, in a board of directors, we see the difference between the seat of the CEO director-in-chief (shape, location) and that of the others directors; in a royal assembly, we see the difference between the throne and the other seats; a material *conformation*: < a bench, a sofa, a deck-chair >; an *epoch*: < a chair by Thonet, a Chippendale chair >; in this notion of period, we also have the difference between cultures because we know that European culture asks for seats while the Japanese, for example, sit on mats (*tatami*). It implies differentiation in position of the body: sitting or cross-legged. Lastly, we have seats made of other types of artefact; they form a complex ensemble; for example, a wheelchair or a dentist’s chair.

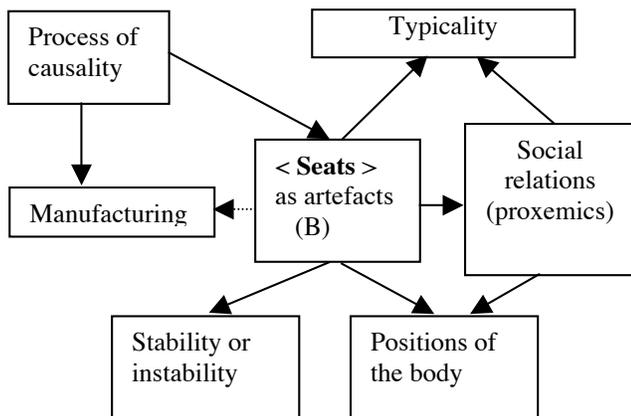
III. < Seats > constitute a good object of study for that which Husserl’s phenomenology calls a “eidetic variation”; they offer a large variety of forms, structure of materials, or association with other types of artefacts (Garner, 1980). They integrate many social values that we can organize within a hierarchy of levels. To give an account of this diversity of semantic dimensions, as behaviour, as materialization, as set, as social status, etc., it is necessary to build a frame of conceptual schemas, similar to previous studies (Boudon 1999, Boudon 2002, Boudon 2003) and called *templum* (as cognitive template). We find with this kind of schema a good “cognitive tool” which can offer a diversity of images of the same object, a means for its classification that allows us to have a general point of view; a homogeneous and diffracted standpoint as in a cubist painting. In short, we have a *principle of homology* which guides us, to unify different levels of lecture, to compare different epoch or cultures, to integrate these entities in different kinds of material domains like houses (so, we can have an “indoor sitting room” or an “outdoor sitting room” that are garden seats), like public spaces (a bench in a park, a bench integrated into the wall of a bus-stop), like vehicles (a seat in a car, in a plane) — different shapes of seats which refer to social and esthetic values.

IV. The generic form of the semantic schema that we use as a cognitive Gestalt can be found at: (www.leap.umontreal.ca/pierreboudon, p. 11) ; its framing is not far

from the conceptual design of the P. Gardenförs's schema (Gardenförs, 2000) which is also a trimensional schema from which we can extract a two dimensional variation between six poles in the equatorial plane (two intertwined triangles of contrasts and subcontrasts); we also have a micro-world of differentiation values which cannot extend indefinitely (on the contrary to Sowa's logical graph). It is the minimal unity of a set which organizes a network of correlations between them. So, this network of correlations constitutes a conceptual mesh or a systematic linkage; we can compare it to the Mercator's chart in which it is possible to see the unknown localizations (Cf. "blanks" of the map) because we introduce semantic coordinates which cover the different domains.

.V. We have two levels of accessibility: the first is level (B) *infra* of each canonical schema of production, and the second (A) is the level of the set that they constitute, building up a conceptual network between them: seats as artefacts, seats as social relations, seats as positions of the body, seats as typicality of their shape (like in Marr, 1982, p. 319); this schema expresses a paradigm of the properties of the seats where we find again Pottier's first distinctions: with/without back, with/without arms, hard/pad with; etc.

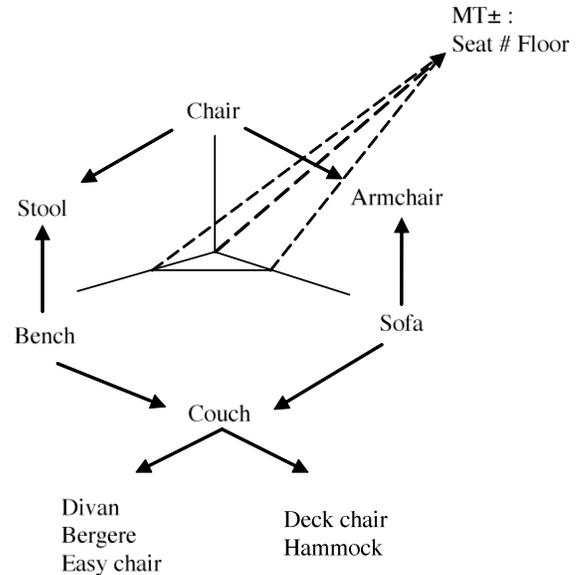
(A) Network of the canonical schemas of production



<Seats>, as artefacts, represent the morphological roots of this problematic as basic types (Mervis & Rosch, 1981) and also (www.leap.umontreal.ca/pierreboudon, p.126): the notion of the *chair*, of the *bench*, of the *sofa*. The opposite of the generic notion <seat> is the notion of <floor> on which we can spread *carpets*; so, from these 3 canonical types we can derive the 3 others as mixes of the previous ones: *stool*, *armchair* or *couch* (not a bed!).

The other problematics are directly associated with these six types: the relationship to the social relations (in terms of *proxemics*, i.e. the socio-psychological distance between people), the relationship to the positions of the body, and the relationship to a stability/instability (in terms of artefact, placed on the ground or hanging, or of the body

(B) <Seats> as types of artefact



itself). But, between these problematics, we have one which is deeper than the others (Talmy, 2000, vol.1, 470-555): the *process of causality* which establishes cognitively these kind of material entities: correlation between agentive forms and passive forms (body and artefact), correlation between causality and finality (intentions in design), correlation between agentivity (making/manufacturing) and means of this function: seats are instruments or places of social relations.

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