



## Folia Linguistica Acta Societatis Linguisticae Europaeae

**Editor-in-Chief: Fischer, Olga / Norde, Muriel**

4 Issues per year

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IMPACT FACTOR 2017: 0.324

5-year IMPACT FACTOR: 0.616

CiteScore 2017: 0.55

SCImago Journal Rank (SJR) 2017: 0.349

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# SEMANTICS APPLIED TO ENGLISH-GERMAN LEXICAL STRUCTURES

**R. R. K. HARTMANN**

**Published Online:** 2009-07-16 | **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.1515/flin.1975.7.3-4.357>

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## SEMANTICS APPLIED TO ENGLISH-GERMAN LEXICAL STRUCTURES

R. R. K. HARTMANN

This paper is concerned with the question of how closely bits of vocabulary from one language match bits of vocabulary from another language; for instance, are English *cook* and German *kochen*, which are etymological doublets, also functionally equivalent?

Contrastive lexical analysis may be considered one of the topics *par excellence* of applied linguistics, yet it has so far not received the attention it deserves. CONTRASTIVE LEXICOLOGY is what I call it; other labels that have been used in the literature are 'comparative semantics' (Hatzfeld, 1923/1928; Reifler, 1954), 'comparative synonymics' (Collinson, 1939), 'lexical/semantic comparison' (Fried, 1967), 'differential lexicology' (Mackey, 1965), 'lexical contrastive analysis' (Hadlich, 1965; Berndt, 1969), 'semantic/lexical interference' (Nemser and Vincenz, 1972). The vantage-point varies, depending on whether the aim is to enlighten semantics, translation, lexicography, bilingualism, or foreign language teaching. But inherent in all these approaches is the belief that lexical patterns can be studied synchronically and descriptively by assessing the similarities and differences in the structure of the vocabulary of two or more languages.

### IS A STRUCTURAL SEMANTICS POSSIBLE?

Any survey of the various branches, stages or phases of linguistic semantics that have contributed significantly to our topic would have to mention PRE-LINGUISTIC WORD STUDIES such as etymology, regional dialectology, the *Wörter-und-Sachen* movement, philosophy of language, psychology of language, ethnology of language (cf. particularly Carroll's discussion of the notion of 'linguistic relativity' as proposed by Humboldt, Whorf and others, 1963) as well as several versions of COMPARATIVE SEMANTICS or 'onomasiology' (cf. Kronasser, 1952/1968; and Koziol, 1967).

But even more important for the development of structural semantics have been the notions of the 'lexical field' and of 'componential analysis'. The theory of the LEXICAL FIELD is usually attributed to Trier (1931)

## About the article

**Published Online:** 2009-07-16

**Published in Print:**

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**Citation Information:** Folia Linguistica, Volume 7, Issue 3-4, Pages 357–370, ISSN (Online) 1614-7308, ISSN (Print) 0165-4004, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/flin.1975.7.3-4.357>.

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