Semantic Prosody

Routledge Advances in Corpus Linguistics

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Semantic Prosody

A Critical Evaluation

Dominic Stewart

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To the assorted Mrs, Ms and Mr Stewarts of my family

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Introduction

If I cast my mind back and try to recall what it was that persuaded me to undertake a book on semantic prosody, it may be that my original objective was simply to pin this concept down once and for all, to establish precisely what semantic prosody is. Indeed when I began researching the subject, interested colleagues would enquire about my investigations and ask me what this arcane-sounding 'semantic prosody' might be. My response was generally of a rambling, circuitous nature, more often than not expressed in highly metaphorical terms, in view of the fact that semantic prosody appears to attract metaphors like a light bulb attracts moths.

In retrospect it seems bizarre that I should have encountered such difficulty in proposing a cursory definition of the topic of my own research project, but as I think will emerge already from the first chapter of this book, the notion of semantic prosody does seem somehow resistant to bite-sized explanations. Certainly what comes across in the literature on corpus linguistics is that the term 'semantic prosody' combines different interpretations and embraces a broad range of features.

The most common interpretation—but by no means the only one or even the most persuasive—tends to be couched in terms which I have paraphrased as follows, with the explanation expressed through an example:

> Semantic prosody is instantiated when a word such as *CAUSE* co-occurs regularly with words that share a given meaning or meanings, and then acquires some of the meaning(s) of those words as a result. This acquired meaning is known as semantic prosody.

Purely for the purposes of preliminary illustration I shall provide an example of this widespread approach through a very brief analysis of the verb *BREAK OUT* in all its inflected forms.[1] A search in the British National Corpus (BNC) for this verb retrieves 1,126 occurrences. A random selection of these is reproduced in Table I.1.

The data reported would suggest that in the majority of cases the verb *BREAK OUT* has conventionally undesirable things or states of affairs in its immediate environment, above all as its grammatical subject (*war*,

Table 1.1 BNC Concordance to 'break/breaks/breaking/broke/broken out' as Verb (Random Selection of 30/1,126)

1. cattle plague is life. Fires keep	*breaking out*.	Rumours — that Fama of The
2 terrorists and was programmed	to *break out*	yesterday, wiping out all data
3. A new wave of IRA attacks then	*broke out*	early in 1979, including several
4. variety of levels showed signs of	*breaking out*	of the loyalist versus republican
5. 1880, The first of the Boer wars	*broke out*.	W. E. Gladstone had returned as
6. 20 minutes, 'Mill began to	*break out*	of their defensive shell and find space
7. dismay to the news. Violencehad	*broken out*,	and there had been anti-Catholic
8. sound of it, World War II was	*breaking out*	behind her and after the race
9. debated in the Senate when war	*broke out*	three years later. The First World
10. Conservative press. 'Labour war	*breaks out*,'	said one paper. 'Struggle over
11. roasted in their handcuffs if fire	*breaks out*.	The VWA, one of five Dutch
12. Here we have a team unafraid to	*break out*	from any area of the field and run
13. a club versus country conflict	*breaking out*	between Chelmsford and Essex
14. Thirdly, the way the war had	*broken out*	stamped the assumptions of the
15. unlikely to question why it should	*break out*.	It formed part of the accustomed
16. 1948 a communist insurrection had	*broken out*	in Burma. In Malaya, the
17. strikes the cattle, and skin infection	*breaks out*	on man and beast, carried by
18. the Marcher lords, open civil war	*broke out*	and Edward was forced to acquiesce
19. Weren't sick then, were you?' Rohmer	*broke out*	into an immediate, drenching
20. gleaming green with new foliage that had	*broken out*	from the charred branches
21. even before the current crisis	*broke out*.	Furthermore, United States Secretary
22. agree with authority, fearful to	*break out*	across the frontiers of duty and
23. will then have owner access after	*breaking out*	of the Captive environment.
24. approval listings can be inspected by	*breaking out*	to an editor using PF1/1
25. it looks like they could soon	*break out*	of the cult ghetto. But hopefully
26. why she came home. Kids have to	*break out*.	She didn't do this to hurt you.
27. it seems that feminist art hasn't	*broken out*	of the tine art 'ghetto'. This is
28. Lane, North Allerton, when a blaze	*broke out*	in the lift shaft. The fire started
29. A fire brigade spokesman said the fire	*broke out*	at a house in The Bank at
30. evacuated from a ward after a fire	*broke out*.	Staff and fire crews moved

conflict, *infection*, *crisis*). The apparent exceptions to this rule are few and far between, for instance *gleaming green with new foliage that had broken out from the charred branches* (line 20).

Habitual co-occurrences are often broken down into one or more semantic sets (for *BREAK OUT* these sets could include, for instance, 'situations of conflict', 'diseases' or, more broadly, 'problematic circumstances'), and these have been described as the semantic preference(s) or semantic association(s) of a given word. (As recommended by Hunston (2007:250), 'word' should really be in scare quotes because the core item may in reality be of two or more words.) Now the substantial number of expressions representing undesirable things in the immediate environment of the keyword has been said to 'colour' or 'infect' it in some way (the metaphors of both

colour and infection have been consistently adopted in the literature), with the result that *BREAK OUT*, while it may not necessarily be classified as a word whose basic meaning is unfavourable, is considered to be associated with an unfavourable semantic prosody or 'aura of meaning' which is contingent upon its semantic preferences. In the case in point this process of colouring would apply more readily to those occurrences where the meaning of *BREAK OUT* corresponds to 'start/develop suddenly'—the prosody in these cases is such that if an expression representing a conventionally favourable state of affairs, such as *peace*, is used as the subject of *BREAK OUT*, then the effect may well be ironic or comic.

This, I repeat, is the most widespread interpretation of semantic prosody in the literature on corpus linguistics, and in the first instance it may seem relatively unproblematic. However, once we go beyond the stage of the preliminary definitions used in the literature, a closer analysis of the concept reveals its complex and multi-faceted nature. Indeed, in accordance with whichever of its multiple features is/are prioritised, it has been approached in such diverse ways that it has ended up meaning markedly different things to different people. This is perhaps to be expected when the concept in question is as young as semantic prosody, but what is striking is that so far there has been little acknowledgement by individual authors of the sometimes very diverse readings of it from one study to the next. Furthermore, it can happen that conflicting positions are adopted within a single work, again without any apparent recognition of this conflict.

With this in mind, my principal aim in this book is to examine closely all the various characteristics which have been attributed to this notion, in order to assess (i) the validity of such characteristics when examined individually, and (ii) whether such characteristics taken as a whole can be said to justify semantic prosody as a unitary theoretical concept. I shall then suggest ways in which we might attempt to reconcile the various descriptions provided in the literature. Attendant upon my investigations are issues of relevance for corpus linguistics in general, for example the way we seek and interpret corpus data, and the relationship between word and environment. I should alert the reader straightaway that during the course of the book I repeatedly discuss and frequently challenge studies conducted on semantic prosody so far, above all in Chapters 5 and 6. This approach may ultimately come across as tiresome, but it is my belief, firstly, that scholars in any given field need to engage with each other directly in order to move that field on, and, secondly, that many of the research premises and theoretical foundations upon which work on semantic prosody is based lie within treacherous terrain, and must be met head on if this concept and field of analysis are to continue as an object of investigation.

In Chapter 1 a brief chronological review is provided of contributions on semantic prosody—in particular of the way it has been defined—from 1987, when ideas behind this concept were first propounded, until the present day. It should be emphasised that very few of these contributions

deal with semantic prosody alone—observations regarding semantic prosody tend to be housed within works touching upon a range of aspects pertaining to corpus linguistics. The purpose of the review is not to establish any coherent chronological development on the subject, something which in any case would not be straightforward, but to identify a set of attributes which have been associated with semantic prosody over the last 20 years. These attributes are then examined in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 examines two characteristics which have been claimed for semantic prosody by the great majority of contributions on the subject—its evaluative function and its 'hidden' quality. Even these features, however, require close attention. The evaluative quality attributed to semantic prosody is not uncontroversial, and in any case overlaps awkwardly with the sphere of connotation, while the hidden attribute is perhaps not as fundamental to semantic prosody as has been claimed. Indeed the hidden attribute would appear to rest upon an assumption of semantic 'neutrality' of the lexical item for which the prosody is inferred, but this gives rise to the question of whether semantic prosody can be inferred for lexical items which are *not* semantically neutral, and thus to the question of whether all lexical items might have prosodic potential.

Chapter 3 examines contributions on semantic prosody in terms of synchrony and diachrony. Many authors present semantic prosody both in synchronic and diachronic terms—the latter in particular often being expressed by means of a range of metaphors—though they consistently adopt synchronic corpora to illustrate it. It is argued here that although it goes without saying that either approach is perfectly defensible, an unstated conflation of the synchronic and the diachronic is injudicious. Crucial in this connection is the nature of the 'unit' with which semantic prosody has often been associated.

In Chapter 4 the question of the unit is taken up in earnest, with focus on semantic prosody within the framework of the relationship between lexical item and environment. The nature of this relationship has been construed in different ways in studies on semantic prosody, with some explanations considering semantic prosody to belong primarily to the word, and others taking it to be a feature of a longer sequence. It is argued that both approaches have theoretical drawbacks.

In Chapters 5, 6 and 7 semantic prosody is considered in connection with the broader issues of the use, role and influence of corpus data—in particular data accessed via concordances—and with the role of intuition and introspection in corpus investigations.

Chapter 5 introduces the issue of how semantic prosody is inferred from corpus data. Initially, questions are asked about the claim that semantic prosody is best revealed, or only revealed, by corpus searches. This is followed by a brief review of the main methods used to assemble corpus data, and by some considerations concerning the ways we interpret the data using

the criteria of collocation and semantic consistency. It is then argued that the way we infer semantic prosody through corpus investigations is crucially affected by our judgements about the world, in particular how we distinguish good from bad, by the nature and length of the textual sequence taken as the unit of analysis, and by the criteria we adopt in analysing that sequence.

Chapter 6 continues the theme of the previous chapter, this time concentrating on the features of the concordance. It is claimed that the unique structure of the concordance has had significant bearing upon the way semantic prosody has been described in the literature.

Chapter 7 addresses the crucial roles of intuition and introspection, often minimised or stigmatised in studies on semantic prosody, in seeking insights about word meaning and in utilising corpora to search for and identify prosodies. Central to this will be the opposition between intuition and introspection on the one hand, and corpus data on the other.

In Chapter 8 I try to position semantic prosody with respect to Hoey's (2005) theory of lexical priming. References are made to lexical priming during the course of the book but such is the importance of Hoey's theory that I have thought it best to reserve more earnest considerations for a separate chapter.

The Conclusions will attempt to bring together the work of the rest of the book in order to assess the theoretical validity of semantic prosody, to clarify some outstanding terminological questions, and to point the way for further research in the field.

All the concordances analysed in this book, with the exception of those reproduced from the work of other scholars, are from the British National Corpus, which I judged to be sufficiently representative for my purposes. For details about the BNC see www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk. Unless otherwise stated, all references to sections (e.g., 2.1, 5.1.2) are to sections of this book.

1 Features of Semantic Prosody

Infinite riches in a little room

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I shall provide a brief chronological review of the literature on semantic prosody, starting from some initial observations by Sinclair in 1987. I shall do this because it seems important to place contributions on the subject within a temporal context from the very outset, despite the fact that these contributions are not necessarily characterised by any systematic chronological development. On the contrary, the literature on semantic prosody is more usefully examined on a thematic basis, and subsequent chapters are in fact organised by theme rather than by chronology or by individual scholar.

This initial review is by no means intended to be exhaustive, its purpose is simply that of furnishing a preliminary outline of the most important works and scholars in the field, functioning as a backdrop to the closer and more critical analysis provided by the chapters which follow.

1.1 A CHRONOLOGICAL REVIEW

1.1.1 Sinclair (1987, 1991)

Semantic prosody is a concept which has been a focus of interest among corpus linguists over the last 15–20 years. It was originally an idea of Sinclair's in 1987, though he did not use the term as such when he first discussed it. Interest was initially kindled by Sinclair's observations regarding the lexicogrammatical environment of the phrasal verb *SET IN*, later reiterated in Sinclair 1991 (74). Using a corpus of around 7.3 million words, the author makes the following observations:

1. The clauses in which *set in* is chosen are in general rather short—six words or fewer in the main. The longer ones are longer because of an adjunct rather than the subject, which is in most cases a single word or an article and noun pair.

2. A number of clauses are subordinate. With the samples available, it is not possible to assign status in every case, and there are some of clear main clauses; but I think the tendency to lower status should be noted.

3. *Set in* is final in the clause in 22 of the 29 cases, and sentence-final in nine of them, showing a clear tendency to end structures.

(Sinclair 1991:74)

Particularly salient in the concordance of *SET IN* are this verb's grammatical subjects (ibid.: 74–75):

> The most striking feature of this phrasal verb is the nature of its subjects. In general, they refer to unpleasant states of affairs [. . .] The main vocabulary is *rot*, *decay*, *malaise*, *despair*, *ill-will*, *decadence*, *impoverishment*, *infection*, *prejudice*, *vicious* (*circle*), *rigor mortis*, *numbness*, *bitterness*, *mannerism*, *anticlimax*, *anarchy*, *disillusion*, *disillusionment*, *slump*. Not one of these is conventionally desirable or attractive.

Later in the same work the author (ibid.:112) notes, within the framework of his idiom principle, that "many uses of words and phrases show a tendency to occur in a certain semantic environment. For example the word *happen* is associated with unpleasant things—accidents and the like".

These observations were striking because they were new and backed up by replicable corpus data, which included conspicuous numbers of co-occurrences representing unpleasant states of affairs in the respective environments of both *SET IN* and *HAPPEN*.

1.1.2   Louw (1993)

The term 'semantic prosody' itself gained currency in Louw (1993), and was based upon a parallel with Firth's discussions of prosody in phonological terms. In this respect Firth was concerned with the way sounds transcend segmental boundaries. The exact realisation of the phoneme /k/, for example, is dependent upon the sounds adjacent to it. The /k/ of *kangaroo* is not the same as the /k/ of *keep*, because during the realisation of the consonant the mouth is already making provision for the production of the next sound. Thus the /k/ of *kangaroo* prepares for the production of /æ/ rather than /iː/ or any other sound, by a process of "phonological colouring" (ibid.:158). In the same way, Louw claims (ibid.:170) that an expression such as *SYMPTOMATIC OF* prepares (the hearer/reader) for the production of what follows, in this case something undesirable (e.g., *parental paralysis*, *management inadequacies*, *numerous disorders*).

The realisation of phonemes is of course influenced by the sounds which precede them as well as those which follow, and therefore the semantic analogy extends not only to words that appear after the keyword, but more generally to the keyword's close surrounds. According to

Louw (ibid.:159), "the habitual collocates of the form *set in* are capable of colouring it, so it can no longer be seen in isolation from its semantic prosody, which is established through the semantic consistency of its subjects".

Hence Louw's (ibid.:157) definition of semantic prosody as a "consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates", with its implications of a transfer of meaning to a given word from its habitual co-text. His examples include *UTTERLY*, *BENT ON* and *SYMPTOMATIC OF*, for all of which he claims unfavourable prosodies. Louw is particularly interested in irony, and more specifically the type of irony produced by deviations from habitual co-occurrence patterns (ibid.:157):

> Irony relies for its effect on a collocative clash which is perceived, albeit subliminally, by the reader. In order for a potential collocative clash to attract the ironist's interest, there must be a sufficiently consistent background of expected collocation against which the instantiation of irony becomes possible.

Thus if *SYMPTOMATIC OF* is followed by a conventionally favourable expression such as *their courage*, the resulting prosodic conflict might be interpreted, perhaps subliminally, as ironic. However, Louw is careful to point out that this is not necessarily the case. A clash of this type may in his view be quite involuntary, with no ironic intention at all, perhaps disclosing the "speaker's real attitude even where s/he is at pains to conceal it" (ibid.:157). The author subsequently states "the full hypothesis", which runs as follows (ibid.:171):

> Where encoders intend their remarks to be interpreted ironically, they 'write the device' in the form of an exception to an established semantic prosody. Conversely, where an utterance runs contrary to an established semantic prosody and it is clear that it is not intended by the encoder to be interpreted ironically, we find that 'the device writes the encoder'.

The author concludes by discussing the potential implications of semantic prosody for stylistics and the persuasion industry.

Louw's hypothesis concerning collocates 'imbuing' forms must rest on diachronic assumptions—the process of a form being imbued by its collocates presumably takes place over a reasonably lengthy period of time. Nevertheless the author makes few explicit allusions to diachronic considerations, remarking that "Prosodies are undoubtedly the product of a long period of refinement through historical change" (ibid.:164). The diachronic question is however taken up more earnestly by Bublitz (1996), as explained below.

1.1.3 Bublitz (1996)

Louw's 1993 article put semantic prosody on the map, so to speak, and has hugely influenced subsequent investigations into the subject. One such investigation is that of Bublitz (1996), who goes along with the idea that a node may be coloured by its habitual co-occurrences, acquiring a "halo" of meaning as a result:

> Words can have a specific halo or profile, which may be positive, pleasant and good, or else negative, unpleasant and bad [. . .] Of course, with semantic prosody, what is involved is negative or positive semantic colouring of node (e.g., *utterly*) and collocate (e.g., *meaningless*). The node itself is then habitually associated with its semantic prosody, which is based on a semantically consistent set of collocates.
>
> (Bublitz 1996:9)

The author also reiterates on a number of occasions the Firthian idea of a phenomenon which crosses segmental boundaries and "stretches over several units" (ibid.:9). Thus, Bublitz continues, "meaning resides not in a single word but in several words". His examples of words characterised by semantic prosody include *CAUSE*, *HAPPEN*, *COMMIT*, *SOMEWHAT* and *PREVAIL*, but the author is keen to point out—and in this he moves on from Louw—that prosodies will vary according to the different basic meanings of any given word. Sinclair had claimed an unfavourable semantic prosody for *HAPPEN*, but this does not apply to certain meanings of the verb, for example what Bublitz (ibid.:17) terms its "by-chance-meaning" (e.g., 'I happen to know his work'). Similarly, the verb *COMMIT* co-occurs significantly with unpleasant things when its meaning is that of *perpetrate*: in the corpora used by Bublitz, co-occurrences include *adultery*, *offence*, *crime*, *atrocities*, *suicide*, *outrage*, *hara-kiri*, *murder*, *sin*, *error*, *acts of vandalism*, *misconduct*, *death in life*, *sacrilege*, *theft* and *infraction of taste*. However, when *COMMIT* has other meanings, for example, *commit someone/oneself to* (*something*), the unpleasant prosody is not manifest—right-hand co-occurrences include *productivity*, *modernisation*, *establishing man's supremacy*, *a life of austerity*, *new plant construction*.

Particularly worthy of note is that Bublitz' explanation of semantic prosody (ibid.:11) has a more explicitly diachronic emphasis than previous accounts: "we know from lexical semantics that constantly using a word in the same kind of context can eventually lead to a shift in its meaning: the word adopts semantic features from an adjacent item".

Shortly after, referring to Stubbs' (1995:50) hypothesis that *CAUSE*, owing to increasing co-occurrence with predominantly unpleasant words, has developed a much more unpleasant meaning than it once had, Bublitz (1996:12) stresses the need for more evidence:

Particularly promising seems to be a diachronic, contrastive approach, i.e., a close look at *cause* and its collocates in earlier and present-day texts. This should, at least for written discourse, show whether or not the number of negative collocates has been increasing over the decades. If this proves to be the case, we could safely talk of a development, a tendency of *cause* to collocate exclusively with words marked for negativity.

1.1.4 Sinclair (1996a, 1998)

Sinclair (1996a:87–88) defines semantic prosody as follows:

> A semantic prosody . . . is attitudinal, and on the pragmatic side of the semantics/pragmatics continuum. It is thus capable of a wide range of realisation, because in pragmatic expressions the normal semantic values of the words are not necessarily relevant. But once noticed among the variety of expression, it is immediately clear that the semantic prosody has a leading role to play in the integration of an item with its surroundings. It expresses something close to the 'function' of an item—it shows how the rest of the item is to be interpreted functionally.

For Sinclair, semantic prosody is to be understood within his model of the lexical item/extended unit of meaning, which integrates collocation (lexical choices), colligation (grammatical choices), semantic preference (the association of formal patterning with a semantic field) and semantic prosody, which has attitudinal and pragmatic function and is crucial to the unit because this pragmatic function very often constitutes the speaker's reason for making the utterance. As pointed out by Stubbs (2007b:179), these categories correspond to Morris' (1938) distinction of syntax (in Sinclair's model both collocation and colligation), semantics (semantic preference) and pragmatics (semantic prosody). The semantic prosody is one of the obligatory elements of the unit of meaning along with the 'core item', "which is invariable, and constitutes the evidence of the occurrence of the item as a whole" (Sinclair 1998:15), while the other elements are optional.

The author exemplifies this by examining (1996a:84–91) the units of meaning containing the following core items: (i) *NAKED EYE*, for which he posits a semantic preference of 'visibility' and a semantic prosody of 'difficulty' on account of its frequent co-occurrence in the corpus he uses with sequences such as *barely visible to*, *too faint to be seen with*, *invisible to*; (ii) *TRUE FEELINGS*, for which is claimed a semantic preference of 'expression'—usually manifested through verbs such as *show*, *reveal* and *share*—and a prosody of 'reluctance', i.e., reluctance to express our true feelings, on account of co-occurrences such as *will never reveal*, *prevents me from expressing*, *less open about showing*, *guilty about expressing*; (iii)

BROOK as a verb, characterised by a typical environment along the lines of 'we (authority) will not brook (any) + OBJECT'.

The methodology used here represents a major break from previous work on the subject, which had tended (i) to privilege searches where a span of little more than two words to the left or right of the node was sufficient to suggest a prosody, and where as a result the co-occurrences were more easily highlighted in corpus data ('*the rot* set in', 'bent on *destruction*', 'somewhat *ridiculous*'), (ii) to focus on prosodies consequent upon 'semantic sets' which were either markedly good/pleasant or bad/unpleasant (though in practice almost always the latter), and (iii) to show greater concern for the diachronic processes responsible for semantic prosody. Sinclair explored a broader span, a broader 'unit of meaning', in order to reach his conclusions within a synchronic framework, and did not restrict himself to the good/bad opposition. (As suggested above, on a terminological level Sinclair uses both 'unit of meaning' and 'lexical item' to denote this broader span, but it should be underlined that in corpus linguistics, 'lexical item' or simply 'item' is often used in a more general sense, i.e., not only for this longer sequence but also for a single word (Teubert 2005:5). Since, as will become clear, the distinction is a crucial one in the context of semantic prosody, from this point on I shall prefer the terms 'word' on the one hand and 'unit of meaning' (for the longer sequence) on the other, to ensure this distinction, though the boundaries between the two are sometimes blurred. When no distinction is intended, i.e., when the reference is to both words and units of meaning, I shall adopt 'lexical item' or simply 'item'.)

1.1.5   Stubbs (1995, 2001a)

Stubbs has made a significant contribution to studies in the field, not least in terms of the sheer number of examples he has brought to light of lexical items characterised by prosodies. These include:

> *accost, amid, amusement, backdrop, care, cause, commit, community, deadlock, distinctly, soar, heritage, lavish, loiter, lurk, proper, provide, somewhat, standard, undergo, untold.*

Stubbs' work is rich in observations and insights, such as the element of what might loosely be called 'protection from danger' present in the habitual lexical environment of *HERITAGE* (2001a:149–151), e.g., *guard, safeguard, preserve, protect, save*; or the lexical profile of the term *CREDIBILITY* (ibid.:107), which includes *gap, lack, damaged, undermine*; or the relationship of interdependency between prosody and syntax with regard to the verbs *ACCOST, LOITER* and *LURK* (ibid.:198–206).

In his 1995 work Stubbs had made reference to diachronic considerations in connection with the word *CAUSE* (1995:50):

CAUSE is near the stage where the word itself, out of context, has negative connotations. (*AFFECT* is already at this point.) The selection restrictions on *CAUSE* are not (yet?) categorical: it is not (yet?) ungrammatical to collocate *CAUSE* with explicitly positive words. But it is easy to see how an increase in frequency of use can tip the balance and change the system.

Generally speaking, however, the author operates within a synchronic framework when discussing semantic prosody, underlining the role of discourse, above all political and ideological discourse. Indeed in his 2001 work Stubbs switches the nomenclature from 'semantic prosody', which he had adopted in earlier contributions, to 'discourse prosody'—a terminological decision which reaffirms the pragmatic and discourse functions of semantic prosody so vital to Sinclair's approach: "I will prefer the term 'discourse prosodies', both in order to maintain the relation to speakers and hearers, but also to emphasize their function in creating discourse coherence" (Stubbs 2001a:66).

The author's definition of discourse prosody places strong emphasis on its attitudinal quality (ibid.:65):

A discourse prosody is a feature which extends over more than one unit in a linear string. [. . .] Discourse prosodies express speaker attitude. If you say that something is *provided*, then this implies that you approve of it. Since they are evaluative, prosodies often express the speaker's reason for making the utterance, and therefore identify functional discourse units.

1.1.6 Tognini-Bonelli (2001)

Tognini-Bonelli operates within a Sinclairian framework in terms of co-selection and extended units of meaning. The author points out that (2001:24) "what is consistently shown by corpus work is the strict correlation between lexical and grammatical choices which extends the boundaries of the initial unit". The pragmatic dimension is once again central (ibid.:111):

If a word is regularly used in contexts of good news or bad news or judgement, for example, it carries this kind of meaning around with it; and, as noted by Sinclair [. . .] the choice that a speaker/writer will make when selecting a multi-word unit will involve the more local grammatical and lexical constraints around the word, but will also include a perhaps more remote semantic preference and its correspondent on the pragmatic side, semantic prosody.

While Tognini-Bonelli's analyses are based on Sinclair's unit of meaning, she also takes Louw (1993) as a point of reference for her revealing studies

on prosodies in both English and Italian, including *PROPER* (see 4.3.1 for a discussion of this item) and the verbal expression *ANDARE INCON-TRO* (literally 'go towards', but also '(to) face' in a metaphorical sense).

1.1.7   Hunston and Francis (1999), Hunston and Thompson (1999), Hunston (2002)

Work on semantic prosody over the last ten years or so has mostly discussed and rediscussed, with varying degrees of focus, the features of semantic prosody suggested by Sinclair and Louw. The notion of the semantic consistency of lexical profiles is taken up again by Hunston and Francis (1999:137), who explain that "a word may be said to have a particular semantic prosody if it can be shown to co-occur typically with other words that belong to a particular semantic set".

   Hunston and Thompson, in their 'Editors' Introduction' to Channell (1999:38), reiterate the evaluative quality of semantic prosody, as well as the notion that words 'take on' meaning from their immediate surrounds. They also stress (ibid.) the subliminal element which had been of particular importance within Louw's framework:

> The notion of semantic prosody (or pragmatic meaning) is that a given word or phrase may occur most frequently in the context of other words or phrases which are predominantly positive or negative in their evaluative orientation [. . .] As a result, the given word takes on an association with the positive, or, more usually, the negative, and this association can be exploited by speakers to express evaluative meaning covertly.

The covert nature of semantic prosody is highlighted above all by Hunston (2002:61, 119, 141–142), who also recalls the notion that semantic prosody is a result of transferred meaning (ibid.:141): "The term semantic prosody [. . .] usually refers to a word that is typically used in a particular environment, such that the word takes on connotations from that environment".

1.1.8   Louw (2000)

Louw (2000) marks a change of focus with respect to his 1993 article. The author makes no reference to auras of meaning, giving less emphasis to the notion that meaning is transferred over time from habitual collocates to node through contagion. Having provided a review of current understanding of semantic prosodies, he then proposes an amplified definition, claiming that they are a product of fractured contexts of situation. His focus is on unfavourable prosodies, where the fractured context derives from the absence in the immediate co-text of "elements such as persons/personalities and/or relevant objects or even outcomes". From this derives his Contextual Prosodic Theory, which (2000:48) "would seek to elucidate

through semantic prosodies the Firthian view that situational and linguistic contexts are co-extensive".

Louw is keen to distinguish semantic prosody, which he describes as a "strongly collocational" phenomenon (2000:50), from connotation, which he considers to be more "schematic" in nature. In other words, while semantic prosody is contingent upon co-text and is thus inferable in a corpus by means of observation of a word's habitual co-occurrences, connotation is more a question of the instinctive semantic associations that we make with that word, irrespective of co-occurrence factors.

Despite this shift of emphasis by comparison with his 1993 article, Louw's basic definition of semantic prosody picks up on some familiar themes, namely the semantic consistency of collocates and the attitudinal function of semantic prosody:

> A semantic prosody refers to a form of meaning which is established through the proximity of a consistent series of collocates, often characterisable as positive or negative, and whose primary function is the expression of the attitude of its speaker or writer towards some pragmatic situation. A secondary, though no less important attitudinal function of semantic prosodies is the creation of irony through the deliberate injection of a form which clashes with the prosody's consistent series of collocates.
>
> (Louw 2000:60)

1.1.9 Partington (1998/2004a)

Partington (1998, in particular 65–78) also focuses upon the similarities and dissimilarities of semantic prosody and connotation, and on a pedagogical level examines the extent to which dictionaries cater or fail to cater for semantic prosody. The author examines the prosody associated with the verb *PEDDLE*, and is particularly interested in prosodies within the context of political discourse in newspapers, analysing the expressions *SHARP DEALINGS* and *GREEN FUNDAMENTALISM/FUNDAMENTALIST*. In the latter case he claims that "the more frequently *green* collocates with *fundamentalist* the more tainted the former is likely to become" (1998:76).

In Partington 2004a (131–132) semantic prosody is defined as a type of evaluative meaning which is "spread over a unit of language which potentially goes well beyond the single orthographic word and is much less evident to the naked eye". Partington goes on to survey the characteristics of a number of (i) "*happen* words" (*HAPPEN*, *TAKE PLACE*, *OCCUR*, *SET IN*, *COME ABOUT*), and (ii) "amplifying intensifiers" (*ABSOLUTELY*, *PERFECTLY*, *ENTIRELY*, *COMPLETELY*, *THOROUGHLY*, *TOTALLY*, *UTTERLY*), noting sometimes subtle variations among them with respect to syntax, cohesion, register and above all semantic prosody. The author also discusses the interaction and partial overlap between the concepts of semantic preference and semantic prosody.

1.1.10 Hoey (2005)

One of the fundamental tenets of Hoey's theory of priming is the following:

> As a word is acquired through encounters with it in speech or writing, it becomes cumulatively loaded with the contexts and co-texts in which it is encountered, and our knowledge of it includes the fact that it co-occurs with certain other words in certain kinds of context. The same applies to word sequences built out of these words; these too become loaded with the contexts and co-texts in which they occur.
>
> (Hoey 2005:8)

Priming, however, unlike semantic prosody, goes beyond circumscribed sequences of words and beyond the sentence, in that a word may be textually primed, i.e., primed to appear in particular textual positions with particular textual functions, something greatly influenced by text domain and genre. Thus whereas semantic prosody is contingent upon lexical co-occurrence within a fairly restricted window (usually 5–6 words to the left and right of the node or core item), priming is concerned with a span which may correspond to longer stretches of text. Further, while semantic prosody has generally been described as belonging either to the word or to the unit of meaning, Hoey stresses that although he uses the word as his starting point rather than a longer sequence (ibid.:158), priming nevertheless belongs to the individual rather than the word: "Words are never primed *per se*; they are only primed for someone" (ibid.:15).

It is also worth noting that priming is described as a feature of all lexical items, whereas in descriptions so far semantic prosody has been confined to a fairly restricted selection.

Priming thus has a different scope and emphasis by comparison with semantic prosody, which itself is described (ibid.:22–24) as a problematic concept in the literature. With reference to Whitsitt (2005), Hoey points out that the notion of semantic prosody as understood by Louw has been disputed, and that in any case Louw's interpretation of it is different from Sinclair's. Hoey (2005:23) also stresses the need to avoid blurring the boundaries between the concepts of semantic prosody and semantic preference as originally proposed by Sinclair, and admits to having conflated the two notions himself in some of his earlier works. In his 2005 work Hoey favours the denomination 'semantic association' in place of 'semantic preference', for the following reason (ibid.:24):

> The terms semantic preference and semantic association may be seen as interchangeable. My reason for not using Sinclair's term is that one of the central features of priming is that it leads to a psychological preference on the part of the language user; to talk of both the user and the word having preferences would on occasion lead to confusion [. . .] The change of term does not represent a difference of position between Sinclair and myself.

1.1.11   Whitsitt (2005)

Whitsitt (2005) represents something of a turning point in studies on semantic prosody in that his contribution is the first to express forthright reservations about the way it has been presented in the literature. The author claims that semantic prosody as a concept is far from univocal, having been described in three distinct ways: from a primarily diachronic point of view (above all Louw 1993, Bublitz 1996), from a primarily pragmatic point of view (Sinclair, Stubbs), and in connotative terms (Whitsitt refers to Partington 1998, but see also Partington 2004a, Stubbs 2001a, Hunston 2002).

He takes issue in particular with Louw's (1993) description of semantic prosody, focusing (i) on the synchronic/diachronic question, (ii) on the role of intuition in identifying prosodies, and (iii) on Louw's liberal use of insufficiently explained metaphors in his description of semantic prosody. All these aspects will be examined singly in the forthcoming chapters.

1.1.12   Hunston (2007)

Hunston reaffirms the point underlined by Whitsitt (2005), that semantic prosody has been described in various ways, her primary distinction being between Sinclair's use of the term to refer to the discourse function of a unit of meaning, and other scholars' interpretations of it as the implied attitudinal meaning of a word/expression. Hunston's work is particularly valuable in the way it pinpoints what the author terms "sites of disagreement" (2007:250), which include (i) the issue of whether semantic prosody is to be regarded as the property of a word/expression or of a longer unit of meaning, (ii) whether semantic prosody's attitudinal meaning is best expressed as a binary distinction (positive vs. negative, favourable vs. unfavourable) or whether its characterisation should ideally be conceptually more specific (for example the prosodies of 'difficulty' and 'reluctance' posited by Sinclair—see 1.1.4), (iii) the question of whether semantic prosody can 'carry over' from one context to another. The author also focuses on the more general theme of how corpus evidence is to be interpreted, in particular the degree to which corpus evidence of what is usual can be used to predict the effect of an individual instance (the reference is principally to Louw 1993, who had argued that a "collocative clash" will point to irony or insincerity), rather than simply to explain it.

1.2   OTHER KEY AREAS IN STUDIES ON SEMANTIC PROSODY

1.2.1   Local Prosodies

Discussions of semantic prosody are usually conducted using large general corpora with no privileging of any specific text type as the object of analysis. Worth noting in passing, however, is the increasing number of

references to the prosodic implications of literary texts, e.g., Louw (1993), Adolphs and Carter (2002), Stubbs (2005), Adolphs (2006), O'Halloran (2007), while Hoey (2005:172–177, 2007) has focused on literary creativity within his theory of lexical priming. Particular attention has been devoted to the poet Philip Larkin's *First Sight* (Louw 1993, Hoey 2007, who refers back to a much earlier analysis in Sinclair 1966).

Some studies are reserved for the role of semantic prosody in other text types or specific subject areas. Tribble has introduced the concept of 'local prosodies', for example in Tribble 2000 (86):

> words in certain genres may establish local semantic prosodies which only occur in these genres, or analogues of these genres [. . .] I am not assuming that all keywords in a text will have specific local semantic prosodies, but I am proposing that this is an aspect of language worth considering as it will constitute important local knowledge for writers in a specific genre.

With this in mind Tribble posits a local prosody for the term *EXPERI-ENCE* in a corpus consisting of project proposals submitted to the European Union's PHARE programme (the PP corpus), in view of the fact that in the corpus in question this term appears to be used for things such as office experience, work experience, skills experience, whereas in all text-types the word has a much wider range of use. Similarly, Nelson (2006) makes an analysis of semantic prosody in business English, investigating words such as *competitive*, *market* and *export* and noting in particular how words become more collocationally fixed in specialist linguistic environments. Cheng (2006) identifies prosodies in a collection of spoken discourse concerning the SARS crisis in 2003, extracted from the Hong Kong Corpus of Spoken English. The aim is to describe (ibid.:325) "the cumulative effects of the habitual co-selection in the lexical items that contribute to textual meanings and coherence within and across the texts".

Stubbs often points out the lexical profiles of words in specific sectors. For example in the general corpus used by the author (2001a:95–96), around 80% of a random selection extracted from a concordance to *CHOPPED* had recipes as their source, with a profile including *finely*, *fresh*, *parsley*, *onion*, *garlic*, *tbsp*, *tomatoes*. The other 20% occurred in other text-types and had a greater tendency to combine with the prepositions *off*, *up* and *down*, some from contexts involving violence to humans. A further example: the author notes (ibid.:89–95) that the verb *UNDERGO* is characterised by a generally unpleasant prosody, but that (p.92) "in scientific and technical English, the word is usually neutral".

Partington (2004a:153) notes more generally that "initial research seems to show that it is highly likely that the quality and strength of the prosody of a good many items will differ from genre to genre or from domain to domain". He then cites investigations carried out by Stubbs (2001a:106),

affirming that generally speaking the term *lavish* as an adjective can have a "neutral-to-good" prosody, but that in journalism its prosody is much less favourable. Partington (2004a:153–154) concludes that

> in the 'lexi-grammar' of newspaper reporting, the word *lavish* [as an adjective] is accompanied by the indication that 'this word is often used to express disapproval', whereas in the lexi-grammar of, say, normal British conversation, the entry for *lavish* would contain no such indication.

Hoey (2004:23) too underlines the importance of sector-specific factors within his theory of priming:

> Part of our knowledge of a word is that it is used in certain kinds of combination in certain kinds of text. So I hypothesise (supported by small quantities of data) that in gardening texts *during the winter* and *during the winter months* are the appropriate collocations, but in newspaper texts or travel writing *in winter* and *in the winter* are more appropriate; the phrase *that winter* is associated with narratives.

Hunston (2007:263–265) also underlines the register-specific nature of semantic prosody. For example she notes that *CAUSE*, which has been assigned an unfavourable prosody by other authors (e.g., Stubbs 1995:26), may lose its association with unfavourable evaluation in scientific registers.

1.2.2   Semantic Prosody in Contrastive Studies

The last few years have featured a number of studies of semantic prosody across languages. These include Xiao and McEnery's (2006) comparison of prosodies of near-synonyms across English and Chinese, and Berber-Sardinha's (2000) similar comparison of English and Portuguese. Xiao and McEnery conclude that collocational behaviour and semantic prosodies of near-synonyms are fairly similar in English and Chinese, an important claim in view of the obvious dissimilarities between the two languages. However, the authors stress the difficulty of achieving a balanced comparison in view of the fact that collocation and semantic prosody may be affected by morphological variations in English but not in Chinese, where such variation is absent. Berber-Sardinha's conclusion is that semantic prosodies may vary across English and Portuguese: in some cases the prosody appears to be similar for near-synonyms (*commit* vs. *cometer*), while in others it is not (*set in* vs. *estabelecer-se/manifestar-se*).

Both studies stress, however, that such phenomena should receive far more attention in pedagogy (language teaching, translation teaching, dictionary compilation) than is currently the case. Similarly, in Munday's (forthcoming) cross-linguistic analysis of semantic prosodies in comparable reference corpora of English and Spanish, the author envisages more

earnest collaboration between translation studies theorists, monolingual corpus linguists and software developers. He also makes the important point that corpus data are particularly useful to translators (in this case, translators working into their mother tongue) because "the translator may be aware of the general semantic prosody of target text alternatives (since these are in his/her native language) even if sometimes he/she is less sensitive to subtle prosodic distinctions in the foreign source language."

Tognini-Bonelli (2001:113–128, 2002) uses corpus data to compare semantic prosody within analogous units of meaning in English and Italian, Stewart (2009) analyses the question of prosodies in translation between English and Italian, and Partington (1998:48–64) claims that perfect equivalents across English and Italian are few and far between because even words and expressions which are 'lookalikes' or false friends (e.g., *correct* vs. the Italian *corretto*) may have very different lexical environments. Dam-Jensen and Zethsen (2008) test awareness of prosodies in English on the part of non-native English students of translation.

1.2.3   Intuition

Before proceeding it is worth recalling two further claims that are mentioned recurrently by a substantial number of scholars in their discussions of semantic prosody. The first is that semantic prosody is best, or even only, revealed by computational methods, e.g., Hunston (2002:142): "Semantic prosody can be observed only by looking at a large number of instances of a word or phrase, because it relies on the typical use of a word or phrase". The second claim, manifestly related to the first, is that intuition is an unreliable guide to semantic prosody. To take just two examples among many, Bublitz (1996:23) affirms that "intuitions about frequency and likelihood of co-occurrence are notoriously thin and not always accurate", and Stubbs (1995:24) takes the view that "attested data are required in collocational studies, since native speaker intuitions are not a reliable source of evidence".

There will be some preliminary discussion of these claims in Chapters 5 and 6, before the matter is taken up in earnest in Chapter 7.

1.3   AN IMPORTANT RIDER: SEMANTIC PROSODY AS MEANING OR PROCESS?

Most of the definitions and descriptions examined so far present semantic prosody as a type of meaning. However, so close is the association between semantic prosody and the process or phenomenon from which it derives that it is not uncommon to find semantic prosody defined as a process rather than as a meaning. For example, in Baker et al.'s (2006:58) *Glossary*

of Corpus Linguistics, the entry for 'discourse prosody' (the authors prefer the nomenclature proposed by Stubbs—see 1.1.5) runs as follows: "A term . . . relating to the way that words in a corpus can collocate with a related set of words or phrases, often revealing (hidden) attitudes". The definition supplied by Coffin et al. (2004:xxi) is similar: "The way in which apparently neutral terms come to carry positive or negative associations through regularly occurring in particular collocations".

In these definitions semantic prosody is described not as a meaning but as a "way", as a type of semantic or pragmatic process. Compare also the definition provided in *Wikipedia* (http://en.wikipedia.org—accessed 28.1.2009): "Semantic prosody, also discourse prosody, describes the way in which certain seemingly neutral words can come to carry positive or negative associations through frequently occurring with particular collocations". Gavioli (2005:46) defines it as "the way in which words and expressions create an aura of meaning capable of affecting words around them". Semantic prosody has also been defined as a pattern (e.g., Berber-Sardinha 2000:94) and as a phenomenon (e.g., Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1996:153).

The term 'semantic prosody' is thus used to denote not only a type of meaning but the ways or processes that give rise to that meaning.

1.4   Summary

The preceding review of the literature on semantic prosody, though deliberately brief, suggests that it is a many-sided concept which has been approached in different ways. As explained in the Introduction, the various features which have been attributed to it will be addressed in more detail in the chapters which follow. The next chapter deals with two elements common to all descriptions of semantic prosody—its evaluative and its hidden features.

2 The Evaluative and the Hidden

Some words are more equal than others

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This and the following chapters offer a more earnest analysis of semantic prosody as described in the literature so far. Up to now I have claimed that semantic prosody has been assigned many different characteristics with varying degrees of emphasis, but the present chapter will be devoted to the two features of semantic prosody which are common to just about all descriptions of it—its evaluative function and its 'hidden' quality. I shall argue, however, that these features are, for differing reasons, anything but straightforward.

2.1 EVALUATION

It emerges from the literature review offered in Chapter 1 that almost all discussions of semantic prosody include some type of reference to its evaluative or attitudinal quality, and for many, notably Sinclair, this quality is absolutely central. Before going any further, however, let us consider what is understood by evaluation. Thompson and Hunston (1999:5) define it as follows:

> Evaluation is the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about. That attitude may relate to certainty or obligation or desirability or any of a number of other sets of values.

The definition is very broad—indeed the authors admit that defined in this way the concept is a slippery one—but evaluation has sometimes been interpreted in a more restricted sense, with greater emphasis on lexical expressions of the speaker's/writer's *emotional* attitude. This more specific sense, akin (i) to what has been called "attitudinal stance" (see for example Conrad and Biber 1999), and (ii) to theories of *Appraisal* (see for example Martin 1999 and the *Appraisal* website[1]) and its sub-categories of *affect* (dealing with expressions

of emotion), *judgement* (moral assessments of behaviour) and *appreciation* (aesthetic assessments), would appear to correspond more readily to the type of evaluation referred to by many scholars who have contributed to the topic of semantic prosody. Schmitt and Carter (2004:8), for example, write that the prosody associated with the phrase *BORDERING ON* is that of "approaching an undesirable state (of mind)", a meaning which "entails a negative evaluation of the situation which is key to the meaning sense it imparts", and it was recorded in Chapter 1 that according to Stubbs (2001a:65), prosodies "express speaker attitude. If you say that something is *provided*, then this implies that you approve of it. Since they are evaluative, prosodies often express the speaker's reason for making the utterance".

It follows from this that when speakers/writers use items such as *NAKED EYE*, *TRUE FEELINGS*, *PROVIDE*, *COMMIT*, *SET IN*, *UNDERGO*, *HAPPEN*, *CAUSE*, *SYMPTOMATIC OF*—items often cited in the literature as being associated with semantic prosody (see again Chapter 1)—they make some type of evaluation or convey some type of attitude. In this way an utterance such as *the cold weather set in* might be considered more obviously attitudinal than, for instance, *the cold weather started*; *John Smith had to undergo an operation* more attitudinal than *John Smith had to have an operation*; and *symptomatic of management inadequacies* more attitudinal than *indicative of management inadequacies*.

Verification of this would require a close examination of the context in which utterances of this type are produced and the effect they are designed to have. Nevertheless it does not seem too hazardous to claim straightaway that the evaluative quality of lexical items described as being associated with semantic prosody is not always manifest. Take the prosody of 'difficulty' ascribed by Sinclair (1996a:87) to *NAKED EYE* (see Section 1.1.4). Although the author makes it clear that *NAKED EYE* interacts crucially with other elements within a larger unit of meaning, the evaluative element is not necessarily pivotal, and indeed may be anything but obvious—describing something as visible or invisible to/with the naked eye might come across more as a simple statement of fact than an expression of evaluation or attitude as such. While it is true that Austin (1962:133) hypothesised that ultimately all utterances are characterised by some type of illocutionary force, the evaluative element is not salient, for example, in the following BNC occurrences of *NAKED EYE*:

- Mars and Venus, as viewed by the *naked eye*, do not change size appreciably

- other stars that are visible to the *naked eye* lie within a few hundred light years

- clusters; both are visible with the *naked eye*, not far from the Scorpion's sting

Consider also the common expressions *rigor mortis set in* and *commit suicide*. As pointed out in Chapter 1, both *SET IN* and *COMMIT* have been

assigned unfavourable prosodies on account of their semantic preferences (e.g., illnesses, decay/decline, despair/disillusionment for the former, crimes and death for the latter). Thus one might speculate that the speaker/writer who uses *rigor mortis set in* or *he committed suicide* wishes to express an unfavourable attitude towards rigor mortis and suicide, but in reality this seems anything but straightforward. The problem is that a recurrent alternative, for example, to *set in* in the expression *rigor mortis set in* does not suggest itself: *rigor mortis began*? *rigor mortis started*? *was activated*? *got going*? None of these seems appropriate as a neutral, non-ironic alternative. In the BNC *RIGOR MORTIS* occurs 26 times: in 11 of these it governs a verb. Of these 11, the verbs in question are *set in* (8 times), *be* (twice: *is complete*, *was already well-established*) and *progress* (once: *was progressing*). Now it follows that if a lexical or grammatical choice is practically automatic, then its ability to bring to bear any extra pragmatic nuance is severely restricted. For this reason the hypothesis that *rigor mortis set in* involves a negative evaluation is suspect, perhaps especially within scientific registers. Similarly, there is no obvious alternative to *committed* in the expression *he committed suicide*. Of course there are alternatives to *commit suicide* as a combination, such as *end it all*, *end one's life*, *kill oneself*, but it would nonetheless seem excessive to postulate that the sequence *COMMIT suicide* must entail an expression of attitude.

The item *CAUSE* has also been assigned an unfavourable prosody in the literature (see 1.1.3) on account of co-occurrences such as *accident*, *problem*, *chaos*. However, consider the following two occurrences of *CAUSE* as verb in the BNC:

- The door closed and then Elaine pulled the magazine in, *causing* the letter box to snap shut smartly.

- The inhibitors might therefore be *causing* amnesia not because they prevent protein synthesis but because of their effect on increasing animo acid levels.

Here once again it seems problematic to postulate that some sort of attitude is being expressed, because it is not clear of whom or of what the respective speakers/writers might disapprove. Of letter boxes? Of Elaine? Of inhibitors? Of amnesia (which is, after all, not something to be welcomed)? Perhaps, but a wider context would be required to support this, and it should not be taken for granted. Indeed Hunston (2007:263) supports the hypothesis that *CAUSE* as verb "loses its association with negative evaluation when it occurs in 'scientific' registers", and it may well be that in a fair percentage of its occurrences no evaluation as such is being expressed at all. Louw (2000) assigns negative prosodic status to the sequence *LOAD OF* on account of its frequently unfavourable right-hand occurrences (*rubbish*, *nonsense*), citing an interesting example of this expression on the side of a fleet of delivery trucks: 'Another Load of Crystal Candy and Cadbury's Chocolate Being Delivered'. Again, the question of whether an evaluation is being expressed

is debatable. Considering the nature of the situational context, one could hypothesise that the message writer's primary concern was to gain the attention of passers-by through an eye-catching word combination.

The notion of evaluation is thus a complex one, as illustrated by the *Appraisal* system. Not only would one need to take into account the subsystems of *affect*, *judgement* and *appreciation*, but also the concept of *engagement*—the system of options embracing the speaker's/writer's degree of commitment to the appraisal expressed—and this takes us into the area of presupposition. A further thorny issue is that of exactly whose attitude is being expressed. Considering the perceived importance of semantic prosody for pragmatics and discourse, one assumes that the evaluation belongs to the speaker/writer. However, as Bernardini and Aston (2002:291) point out:

> would this be the speaker as principal, author or animator (to use Goffman's (1981) famous breakdown of the speaker discourse role (Levinson 1988))? In contexts of reported speech, it is clear that prosodies may indicate the evaluation of the cited speaker, not the citing one, as the author (but not animator) of the text in question.

In this respect Hunston (2007:256) notes that "the adjective *persistent* [. . .] is a word that can be used to indicate a mismatch of viewpoints, with the producer of a text indicating a difference between his or her own values and those of one of the participants in the text". See also Adolphs and Carter (2002:8–10).

2.1.1   Unusual Word Combinations

These are just some of the many factors to be borne in mind when considering the evaluative force of utterances, but they may serve to highlight the complex and mercurial nature of this area of pragmatics. Having said that, evaluative function might be considered more easily accounted for when our expectations are overturned and the prosody is, so to speak, 'reversed'. In the Introduction I discussed a concordance of *BREAK OUT* (Table I.1), to which some scholars have ascribed an unfavourable prosody in view of the fact that a substantial number of its typical co-occurrences represent unpleasant things or states of affairs, such as crises or conflicts. Two of the concordance lines reproduced were:

- October 1880, the first of the Boer wars *broke out*. W. E. Gladstone had returned

- dismay to the news. Violence had *broken out*, and there had been anti-Catholic

Now it may be true that a more unfavourable attitude is expressed with *the Boer wars broke out* or *violence had broken out* by comparison with analogous usage such as *the Boer wars began* or *violence had started*, but

once again it could just as well be argued that the co-occurrence of *break out* and *war/violence* is so conventional that no particular nuance—or no extra nuance—is conveyed by their juxtaposition. Yet the situation may change if the usual juxtapositions are flouted. For example, a further BNC occurrence, not included in Table I.1, is

- aware that she should contribute to the peace that had *broken out* between them

which comes across as ironic, i.e., an attitude of irony on the part of a participant in the discourse. This involves the notion of implicatures—deducing implications from what *has* been said concerning what has *not* been said—in particular whereby one or more of the maxims of the cooperative principle is violated (Grice 1975). Indeed one suspects that if it were not for less habitual co-occurrences such as this, the unfavourable prosody said to characterise *BREAK OUT*, though of considerable importance within a co-selection framework, might not, from an evaluative point of view, generate much interest at all.

Therefore the relatively unusual *peace had broken out* is striking because of the apparent irony which it instantiates. Yet unconventional combinations can occur for other reasons which are not easily explained. It was noted in 1.1.2 that Louw (1993:157) defines semantic prosody as a "consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates". If we briefly take this sentence as our object of analysis, the co-existence within a single sentence of *aura*, *meaning*, *form*, *imbued* and *collocates* is certainly unusual, but let us focus here on the phrase *aura of meaning*. There is no occurrence of this phrase in the BNC, though the sequence *AURA OF* has some interesting occurrences at R1, the most frequent being *mystery* (6), *power* (5), and *wealth* (4). The same search was carried out in a much larger corpus which has only recently become available, the Brigham Young University (BYU) 'American Corpus' (www.americancorpus.org), which contains over 385 million words of recent American English within a plethora of text typologies. Here the most frequent occurrences at R1 are:

> *invincibility* (24), *mystery* (20), *power* (15), *authority* (10), *confidence* (9), *authenticity* (7), *success* (6), *inevitability* (6) *legitimacy* (5), *light* (5). Co-occurrences appearing 4 times at R1 include *infallibility*, *command*, *excitement*, *romance* and *exclusivity*.

Perhaps partly as a result of these habitual co-occurrences, Louw's observation is a striking one, though it certainly does not come across as ironic. Perhaps the author is expressing some other type of evaluation, and/or, as Louw himself (1993:157) has noted, what underlies it is "the speaker's real attitude even where s/he is at pains to conceal it". Yet it may also be the case

that unconventional word combinations of prosodic interest are present for reasons which do not immediately connect with the notion of evaluation. Of course we also need to bear in mind that in the sentence analysed the author is adopting metaphors, and that metaphorical language is the epitome of the unorthodox word combination (see Whitsitt 2005:298–300 for an interesting discussion)—something which might debilitate any endeavours to read between Louw's lines on the basis of typical co-occurrence.

The conveying of attitude via unusual co-occurrence is discussed by Hunston (2007), who notes that this belongs to (261) "a more general tradition of calling on the discontinuity between the norm and the individual example to account for the recognition of a variety of stylistic effects". However, as Hunston goes on to point out, although this seems legitimate as a way of *explaining* individual instances, *predicting* meanings such as irony or insincerity (Louw 1993) on the basis of unusual co-occurrence is more complicated. Adopting the example of *TO THE POINT OF*, which according to Hunston (2007:261) is used "to link a less saturated evaluative item with a more saturated one (as in *thin to the point of emaciation*)" and is associated with a negative evaluation, she notes that occurrences which flout this norm are not necessarily indicative of irony, insincerity etc., but may simply be examples of atypical usage with no extra shade of meaning intended (ibid.:262). The occurrence she cites is *fresh to the point of invigoration*, where in the article from which the occurrence is drawn any negative evaluation would be, according to the author, unjustified.

In the same way we might predict that, for example, the combination *utterly compelling* contains some unfavourable or ironic subtext on account of the consistently unfavourable R1 co-occurrences of *UTTERLY* (e.g., *disgraceful, ridiculous, useless*—see also Partington 2004a:147 and 6.2.2), even though *compelling* is an adjective with favourable meaning. Yet the seven occurrences of *utterly compelling* in the BNC, as well as the numerous instances I have checked in *The Guardian* archives, do not appear to support this prediction.

In short, if we insist that every time speakers or writers use unorthodox word combinations, particularly when they involve words which have been assigned clear prosodies (e.g., *UTTERLY*), there must necessarily be some kind of evaluative subtext, and if we insist that all readers will make a similar assumption, then we have waded into treacherous waters. Corpus data can certainly help us to *describe how* words combine, but not necessarily to *explain why* words combine. In the words of Teubert (2005:2), corpus linguistics "wants to describe what cannot be explained".

2.1.2   Semantic Prosody and Connotation

As mentioned in 1.1.1, Whitsitt (2005) claims that semantic prosody has been defined in three different ways and that one of these (ibid.:285), "which is very widespread, treats semantic prosody as if it were a synonym

of connotation". There is certainly no denying that references to connotative aspects abound in descriptions of semantic prosody.

According to Berber-Sardinha (2000:93), "semantic prosody is the connotation conveyed by the regular co-occurrence of lexical items". Partington (1998:67), commenting upon a concordance of *COMMIT*, notes that an "unfavourable connotation can be seen to reside not simply in the word *commit* but over a unit consisting of *commit* and its collocates", while in a later work, the author (2004a:131) observes that semantic prosody is "usually described as an aspect of connotative meaning" and more specifically of the expressive aspect of connotative meaning. Along similar lines, Hunston (2002:142) states that semantic prosody "accounts for 'connotation': the sense that a word carries a meaning in addition to its 'real' meaning. The connotation is usually one of evaluation, that is, the semantic prosody is usually negative, or, less frequently, positive". If we interpret Hunston's remarks as suggesting that fundamentally semantic prosody corresponds to evaluative connotation, then this would suggest that semantic prosody is a subset of connotation. However, the notion that semantic prosody "accounts for" connotation requires elaboration, especially as elsewhere the author appears to present the two concepts as synonymous. Commenting on the phrasal verb *SIT THROUGH*, Hunston (2002:62, note 3) writes that "speakers may be alerted to the presence of *connotation or semantic prosody* by a single example that exploits or misuses it" [my italics].

A similar situation obtains in Stubbs, who also seems to regard connotation and semantic prosody (or discourse prosody, as he terms it—see 1.1.5) as synonymous when he writes (2001a:106): "The distinction between inherent, propositional meaning and connotational meaning (or discourse prosody) may in any case be based on unreliable intuitions". This apparent synonymy is again manifest when Stubbs takes *CAUSE* as a case study to show that (ibid.:43) "observable corpus data can provide evidence of both denotational and connotational meaning", concluding that (ibid.:49) "*cause* has overwhelmingly unpleasant connotations"; later, however (ibid.:65), he gives the unpleasant connotations of *cause* as a first example of discourse prosody. See also Tognini-Bonelli (2004:20) Teubert (2005:5), Adolphs (2006:56).

Other authors are not keen on excessive overlap between connotation and semantic prosody, above all Louw (2000:50), who examines an entry in the 1995 edition of the *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*:

> We need to make it plain that semantic prosodies are not merely connotational. The *Cobuild* definition of *connotation* runs as follows:
>
>> The connotations of a particular word or name are the ideas or qualities which it makes you think of (1995:343).

One of the examples provided in the dictionary entry reads:

'Urchin', with its connotations of mischievousness, may not be a particularly apt word.

Having supplied this example, Louw continues (2000:50):

> Whereas knowledge of connotations is often a form of schematic knowledge of repeatable events, e.g. what urchins do, where they live, their financial means or lack of it and how they behave, etc, SPs are more strictly functional or attitudinal. They relate more directly to what literary critics call authorial *tone* and are supported by a series of collocates such as those mentioned earlier in Stubbs' analysis of *cause*.

Here connotation is construed as a form of schematic knowledge, whereas, if I have interpreted Louw's position correctly, semantic prosody is more attendant upon co-occurrence factors, and is more functional or attitudinal in nature than connotation. The question of semantic prosody as a co-occurrence phenomenon is an important one, and will be dealt with later in this book. More interesting for present purposes is Louw's allusion to "authorial tone", apparently adopted to support the attitudinal aspect of semantic prosody.

2.1.3   Authorial Tone

The *Cobuild* recommendation that *urchin* "may not be a particularly apt word" must be based on the premise that this term, "with its connotations of mischievousness", may be construed as pejorative, or more precisely, as revealing a pejorative attitude on the part of the person who uses it. Therefore, presumably, caution is required when we use or come across it. And of course the same is true of thousands of other words with specific connotations. To take a very obvious example, if most of us avoid adopting the word *nigger*, with all its attendant connotations, it is because we do not wish to risk giving the impression that we are making a pejorative evaluation of black people or that we have an unfavourable attitude towards them.

   This makes it hard to understand why Louw regards semantic prosody as "more strictly attitudinal" than connotation, and why it "relate[s] more directly [than connotation] to what literary critics call authorial *tone*". The author does not state what he means by 'tone', but it would in any case seem arduous to argue that the use of terms such as *urchin* or *nigger* may not contribute to authorial tone. Whitsitt (2005:286) finds Louw's recourse to the term 'tone' unconvincing since, he argues, this is "precisely how connotation has often been described".

   However, Louw's distinction is a valuable one inasmuch as it suggests that whereas semantic prosody is contingent primarily upon the relationship between the item and its typical lexical environment, and upon the

attitudinal aspects that might attend upon this relationship, connotation ties in principally with the relationship between the word and the speaker/hearer, or better the world experience the speaker/hearer associates with a word. Clearly there is a substantial degree of overlap here, because the attitude of the speaker/hearer would appear to be crucial to both connotation and semantic prosody, but for reasons which will be outlined in the next section, this type of overlap is perhaps not conducive to a clear understanding of the concept of semantic prosody.

2.1.4   Connotation and Peripheral Meaning

In his classic work on semantics, Lyons (1977:176) defines the connotations of a word as "an emotive or affective component additional to its central meaning", and later (ibid.:278) as having "secondary implications", while Palmer (1981:92) writes that connotation chiefly refers to "emotive or evaluative meaning". Crystal (1991:74) writes that the main application of connotation is "with reference to emotional associations (personal or communal) which are suggested by, or are part of the meaning of, a linguistic unit, especially a lexical item".

Stubbs (2001a:34) notes that connotation is "affective, associative, attitudinal and emotive meaning", and that "connotations are often thought of as subjective, second-order or peripheral meanings, which depend on a relation between the word and the speaker/hearer" (ibid.:35). According to Yallop (2004:28): "The term *connotation* tends to slip awkwardly between something like 'peripheral meaning' and 'emotive meaning' and 'personal associations'".

If we compare this brief cross-section of definitions with the descriptions of semantic prosody cited so far in this book, what emerges is that semantic prosody and connotation share an attitudinal/affective attribute, and Crystal's comments suggest that connotation, like semantic prosody, may characterise linguistic units rather than simply words. Some overlap is perhaps inevitable if only because, as Partington (2004a:154) points out, connotation is such a versatile concept:

> The term 'connotation' is made to do an immense amount of work, covering concepts as varied as social connotation (consider *awfully clever* and *dead clever*), cultural connotation (*whisky* in Glasgow or Riyadh) and expressive connotation, the latter being close to evaluative meaning.

See also Palmer (1981:92) regarding the various interpretations of 'connotation'. However, what seems particularly important is that in the works cited connotation is consistently described as "additional", "peripheral" and/or "second-order" meaning. Now although Partington (2004a:154) is careful to point out that there may be nothing secondary about expressive

connotation (his example is the item *pig-headed*), the fact remains that in view of the way the term 'connotation' is normally construed, any scholar who defines semantic prosody in connotative terms at once risks collision with Sinclair, for whom semantic prosody is anything but secondary or peripheral. On the contrary, according to Sinclair semantic prosody is absolutely central to the unit of meaning and indeed represents the initial functional choice linking the meaning to the purpose (see 1.1.4). When Sinclair (2004:175–176) posits a prosody of 'anticipated failure' for the unit of meaning containing *EFFORTS TO* (see also 4.2) he carefully underlines that "the selection of the item is controlled by the prosody, because *the whole point* of expressing oneself in this way is to pre-evaluate the actions, which would otherwise be evaluated positively by the reader/listener" (ibid.:175, my italics).

Also worth noting in passing is that connotation has traditionally been considered to characterise the word, whereas for Sinclair semantic prosody characterises an entire unit of meaning (a theme which will be taken up again in Chapter 4). This is not to suggest that Sinclair should have a monopoly on definitions of semantic prosody, but it would seem advisable for authors framing semantic prosody in connotative terms to acknowledge the degree to which this move may conflict with Sinclair's ideas.

2.2 HIDDEN MEANING

The second characteristic of semantic prosody shared by just about all descriptions is its hidden, subliminal, 'unconscious' nature. Hunston and Thompson, in their 'Editors' Introduction' to Channell (1999:38), state that semantic prosody "can be exploited by speakers to express evaluative meaning covertly", while Partington (2004a:131) writes that it describes the same type of evaluative meaning as the more traditional notion of connotative meaning but "is much less evident to the naked eye". Tognini-Bonelli (2001:112), citing Louw's (1993:169–171) argument that semantic prosody can reveal speaker attitudes even when the speaker tries to conceal them, hypothesises that "this lack of control suggests that semantic prosodies operate mainly subliminally and are not readily available to the speaker as discourse devices at the conscious level", and she confirms this later (ibid.:114), stating: "As mentioned above, semantic prosodies are mainly engaged at the subconscious level". Remarks about the subconscious are also made by Hunston (2001:21), who believes that "in instances of semantic prosody the function that a lexical item has in a given text is responded to subconsciously by the reader or hearer".

In similar vein, McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006:84) write that "It would appear, from the literature published on semantic prosody [. . .] that it is at least as inaccessible to a speaker's conscious introspection as collocation is". Louw (1993:171–173) believes that until the advent of corpus linguistics semantic prosodies were hidden from our perception for thousands of

years, while Hunston (2002:61, 119, 141–142) makes several references to how semantic prosody can convey covert messages, hidden meanings and attitudes, and includes this attribute as one of its defining characteristics (ibid.:141). Munday (forthcoming) takes the view that semantic prosody is

> about the way that sense and connotation spread surreptitiously across collocates or from the typical surrounding co-text. Since it is often not overtly controlled by the text producer, it may reveal a writer or speaker's underlying attitude or evaluation.

This covert, subliminal feature is not as a rule stressed by Sinclair, but arguably one of the reasons that his analyses of expressions such as *TRUE FEELINGS* are so fascinating is that the prosodies attributed to them are not obvious. However that may be, the impression from most authors, even from those who do not explicitly define semantic prosody in 'hidden' terms, is that unless a meaning is in some way concealed it may not qualify as a semantic prosody at all. Or at least, if a lexical item expresses evaluative meaning transparently, then any prosody it may be associated with is not worth identifying. Here too there are similarities with the more traditional concept of connotation, since connotations are sometimes described as hidden. Nevertheless the impression is that the concealed quality is somehow more fundamental to semantic prosody than it is to connotation.

Before going any further it seems important to emphasise that although the idea of hidden, subliminal, covert etc. meaning may give the momentary impression of something to which only a highly perceptive few are privy, the point that the scholars quoted are making, if I have understood them correctly, is that as users of a language we would experience difficulty if we were asked to describe the nature of the specific prosody in question. That is, although some awareness of semantic prosodies presumably reaches right across the speech community—for example, one imagines that the potential irony of an assertion such as *after six months their marriage set in* would be picked up by most native speakers of English—those native speakers may nonetheless be unable to articulate either the semantic preferences or the semantic prosody characterising *SET IN*. The issue of speaker awareness raises the question of our ability or inability to intuit or to introspect about prosodies, a crucial question which will be taken up in Chapter 7.

There is no doubt that the notion of hidden meaning is highly appealing because it has crucial implications for stylistics and critical discourse analysis. Peeling away layers of subtext in discourse is an important and engrossing activity, and if corpus linguistics can help us to do this then so much the better. As Koller and Mautner (2004:223) underline, semantic prosody "is at least as exciting a concept for the critical discourse analyst as it is for the lexicographer and the grammarian". However, whether we should axiomatically associate semantic prosody with covert meaning is

open to question. Such an association, as I argue in the following section, seems to rest crucially upon the fact that prosodies are usually attributed to semantically more 'neutral' items.

2.2.1 Semantic Neutrality

Channell (1999) is analogous to Louw (1993), in that both authors use corpus data to shed light on less transparent meanings of words and phrases. Nevertheless, Channell differs from Louw in that she does not confine herself to items with less obviously evaluative meanings, since her analysis embraces not only items such as *REGIME* and *PAR FOR THE COURSE*, where it could be argued that a less obvious (negative) evaluation is implied, but also *FAT* and *SELF-IMPORTANT*, where the speaker's/writer's evaluation may be more transparent. It is worth noting, however, that in her contribution Channell makes no recourse whatsoever to the term semantic prosody, or for that matter to connotation, and does not employ separate terms for transparent and hidden meanings respectively. She adopts the expression 'evaluative polarity' throughout the article, but this is extended equally to both more and less transparent meanings.

This is interesting in the current context because almost all studies on semantic prosody produced so far have focused on lexical items which do not appear to have manifestly positive or negative basic meanings. In other words, there is a predilection for words and expressions with a rather more neutral basic meaning, and indeed this notion of semantic neutrality is occasionally stated explicitly, for example when Munday (forthcoming) remarks that "semantic prosody refers to how what might be expected to be a semantically neutral form, such as the lemma *cause*, in fact tends be used with words that give it a particular hue (negative in the case of *cause*)".

As recorded earlier, classic examples ('classic' in the sense that many of them have been discussed and rediscussed) of items associated with semantic prosody include: *HAPPEN, SET IN, BREAK OUT, CAUSE, COMMIT, UNDERGO, PROVIDE, SOMEWHAT, UTTERLY, ABSOLUTELY.* What is particularly noticeable here is that the basic meanings of the items in this list—and those of other items discussed in the literature—could be said to fall into extremely frequent and fairly 'neutral' semantic groups: 'happening, making happen' (*HAPPEN, SET IN, OCCUR, TAKE PLACE, COME ABOUT, BREAK OUT, CAUSE, BRING ABOUT*), 'doing' (*COMMIT*), 'receiving' (*UNDERGO*), 'giving' (*PROVIDE*), 'rather', 'fairly' (*SOMEWHAT*), 'completely' (*UTTERLY, ABSOLUTELY,* as well as *TOTALLY, COMPLETELY, ENTIRELY*). The literature on semantic prosody abounds with studies of items of apparently innocuous meaning such as *AMID, A BIT OF A, EFFORTS TO.*

Worth noting also is the recurrence of prepositional verbs used as examples of lexical items associated with semantic prosody (*SET IN*, *BREAK OUT*, *SIT THROUGH*, *COME ABOUT*, *BRING ABOUT*, *FORK OUT*, *ANDARE INCONTRO* (literally 'go towards'—see Tognini-Bonelli 2001:113–116). Of course prepositional verbs in general are not especially characterised by neutral meanings—they can have meanings which are just as strongly positive or negative as any other item (e.g., *they'll take it out on me*, *she blew up at them*), but it should be recalled that one of the reasons learners of English find these verbs so difficult to assimilate and remember is precisely that their meaning is very often not transparently derived from the verb + preposition combination, something which may bestow upon such verbs a superficially more neutral quality.

Analyses of the semantic prosodies characterising more obviously positive or negative items, on the other hand, are relatively uncommon, though there is the odd example. Partington (1998:67) analyses *RIFE*, Stubbs (2001a:85) takes a brief look at the lexical profile of *RECKLESS*, and Tognini-Bonelli (2001:19–21) examines *FICKLE*, items which intuitively come across as possessing unfavourable basic meanings (though this is not the focus of interest in the analyses mentioned), but in the literature these are the exception rather than the rule.

Naturally items with an ostensibly 'neutral' meaning lend themselves more readily to analyses of any hidden shades of meaning, precisely because of their apparent neutrality. It is no coincidence that Partington (2004a) makes a detailed examination of the prosodies of various '*happen* words', including not only *HAPPEN* and *SET IN* but also *OCCUR*, *COME ABOUT* and *TAKE PLACE*, and of various "amplifying intensifiers" (*ABSOLUTELY*, *UTTERLY*, *TOTALLY*, *COMPLETELY*, *ENTIRELY*, *THOROUGHLY*), presumably (i) because at first sight the items of each of these sets are more or less synonymous, and (ii) because they do not come across as markedly favourable or unfavourable in meaning.

Mahlberg (2005:149–150) proposes a three-way categorisation of the evaluative meanings of lexical items in context, the subdivisions being (i) core meaning, referring to words which have a core meaning which is clearly evaluative, (ii) prosody, and (iii) text meaning, referring to words "that do not typically express evaluation, but depend to a larger extent on a specific text" (ibid.:150). The division proposed would seem to exclude that items with evaluative core meanings—which have been referred to in semantics as 'attitudinal lexis' (see also Thompson and Hunston (1999:14), who define such items as "very clearly evaluative, in the sense that evaluation is their chief function and meaning")—have prosodic potential. Yet in the literature on semantic prosody, prosodies have been assigned primarily on the basis of an item's co-occurrence with words and expressions denoting favourable/unfavourable states of affairs, and we need to bear in mind that the habitual co-occurrences of

items with evaluative core meaning can be just as consistently favour-able or unfavourable as the co-occurrences of less obviously evaluative items. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1996:157) writes: "I would see no reason [. . .] not to use the term *semantic prosody* for the cases when the semantic load of an item is quite explicit".

An examination in the BNC of the lexical profiles of, for example, what I shall loosely call '*superior* words', such as *SUPERIOR, SNOBBISH, PRIGGISH, SELF-RIGHTEOUS, PATRONISING, CONDESCEND-ING, POMPOUS, STUCK UP, SELF-IMPORTANT*, rapidly discloses not only apparently 'innocent' co-occurrences such as *look, expression, attitude, person*, as well as a couple of apparently positive ones such as *smile*, but also a striking array of highly uncomplimentary co-occurrences such as *opinionated, preposterous, smug, sod, bastard, bitch* and other even more vigorously unpleasant descriptions. The adjectives *FAT* and *SELF-IMPORTANT*, according to Channell (1999:41–44), who was using the Bank of English when its size was around 200 million words, are also to be found in undesirable company: *FAT* co-occurs with *old, ass, bald, slob, crafty, pompous*, and *SELF-IMPORTANT* co-occurs with *swill, slop-bucket, insincere, overwrought, self-adoring, plodding, bloated, alarmingly*. This is because, as Channell (ibid.:44) points out, "speakers and writers cluster negative items so that there is a mutually supporting web of negative words". One of the texts included in the BNC can boast the following sequence of epithets: '(I also linked wealth with being) self-ish, greedy, materialistic, hard-hearted, snobbish and dull', and Martin (1999:146) reports an extraordinarily long and uninterrupted sequence of adjectives indicating highly unfavourable judgements from an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. See again Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1996).

2.2.2   A Test Case: SNOBBISH vs. BENT ON

Some readers may be unconvinced by this comparison between the lexi-cal environment of items such as *BREAK OUT* and *SOMEWHAT* on the one hand, and that of items such as *SNOBBISH* and *PRIGGISH* on the other. It might be objected that although the latter do most assuredly have some very undesirable customers in their habitual co-text, their lexical profiles are nevertheless not as *consistently* negative as those of *BREAK OUT, SOMEWHAT* etc. In other words, it is predictable that a substantial percentage of the most frequent co-occurrences of *SNOB-BISH* and *PRIGGISH* will be comparatively unobjectionable words like *person, people, attitude*, and even cheerful-sounding words such as *smile* and *laugh*, whereas the co-occurrences of *BREAK OUT, SOMEWHAT* etc. are reported to be more consistently gloomy. Let us test this by com-paring the concordance of *SNOBBISH*, on the one hand, with the con-cordance of another of the items analysed in the literature for which a negative prosody has been claimed, namely *BENT ON*.

Louw (1993:164–166) reproduces a selection of a concordance to *BENT ON* as an example of an item associated with a distinctive semantic prosody, concluding that "this concordance shows that the pursuits that people are *BENT ON* are almost always negative or unpleasant in some way" (ibid.:166). Yet since Louw is particularly keen to stress the subliminal qualities of semantic prosody which "cannot be retrieved reliably through introspection" (ibid.:157), we must assume that he examines *BENT ON* precisely because its negativity is felt to be not especially manifest, at least not 'on the surface'. But let us begin by examining the results of a simple BNC query for *SNOBBISH*. There are sixty occurrences, of which a random selection is reproduced in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1   BNC Concordance to 'snobbish' (Random Selection of 30/60)

1. invalid and recluse, of someone	*snobbish*	and sometimes selfish and inhumane
2. British filmmaking for being	*'snobbish*,	anti-intelligent, emotionally inhibited
3. beck and call of her wicked,	*snobbish*	guardians, with a travelling shoe salesman
4. move away', he appealed, 'from our	*snobbish*	caste-ridden hierarchical obsessions
5. and his own diaries, an intolerable man—	*snobbish*,	reactionary, racist, lamenting
6. 'culture'. I use this word not in its	*snobbish*	sense, but as a scientist uses it. Culture
7. of transport cannot reach. To the	*snobbish*	traveller coach tours are a subject of
8. tawdry behaviour? Am I naïve or	*snobbish*	in thinking that better standards ought
9. suburban family, this pretentious and	*snobbish*	side of Eva amused Dad and me.
10. laden communication. If you're	*snobbish*	about the vocals then you're probably
11. people and their empty lives? Coward's	*snobbish*	game-playing is history. The
12. his skills for Juventus. Tax on snobs	*SNOBBISH*	homeowners are appealing to be
13. on admiring them in the face of the	*snobbish*	dismissal of them by many artists of
14. inarticulate. The plain fact of the matter,	*snobbish*	though it may sound, was that
15. The worst were incompetent and	*snobbish*.	The second type of individual head
16. a mother figure. Privileged yes,	*snobbish*	no. At a very early age the Spencer
17. was almost spat out, a mean and	*snobbish*	cut. 'And the ladies were peacefully
18. as if she were some doggedly	*snobbish*	godmother, inviting them home every
19. and there were the silly ones, the	*snobbish*	ones, the would-be debutantes and
20. in one way or another, prejudiced and	*snobbish,*	although they would have denied
21. the music is not its own art? The	*snobbish*	distinction between art and craft only
22. the aristocrats, so I'm sure the	*snobbish*	doctor's ghost will tolerate my company
23. superiority. Evelyn Waugh is at his most	*snobbish*	worst. Claud Cockburn sneers
24. I would have been insufferably	*snobbish*	and complacent. It is perhaps better
25. idea of what Liberty's is. How very	*snobbish*	of you, you will say; why should
26. class for generous rewards or for some	*snobbish*	appeal. The powerful could act,
27. In the Hapsburg empire, under the most	*snobbish*	and conservative regime of all,
28. Married her father's curate, against his	*snobbish*	wishes, in eighteen fifty four the
29. he shouted across the streets to the	*snobbish*	people of Chichester. 'I lov 'em', he
30. I mean, erm it's so easy to be	*snobbish*	but if the problems of experimentation

In some cases the co-text of *SNOBBISH* seems harmless enough or at least fairly inconclusive, such as lines 6, 7, 26, 29. Yet what is far more conspicuous is its recurrently unpleasant company. According to my approximate calculations, the co-texts of around 34 of the total of 60 occurrences contain words or expressions which could be classified as representing unpleasant states of affairs, and many of these occurrences have three, four or five unpleasant-sounding words within a single line. The co-text includes: *selfish and inhumane*; *anti-intelligent*; *emotionally inhibited*; *wicked*; *arrogant*; *caste-ridden, hierarchical obsessions*; *intolerable*; *reactionary*; *racist*; *tawdry*; *appallingly*; *spongers*; *pretentious*; *greedy, materialistic, hard-hearted*; *sneering*; *infestation*; *prejudiced*; *prudish*; *insufferably*; *complacent*; *bigoted*; *hypocritical*, as well as some aggressive expletives.

Now let us consider the concordance reproduced by Louw as part of his analysis of *BENT ON*. The author provides a selection from a 37-million word *Cobuild* corpus. In this there are 103 occurrences of *BENT ON*, of which the author produces every third one, plus a handful of further occurrences constituting "examples of irony". These are brought together in Table 2.2.

As noted previously, Louw concludes from these occurrences that "the pursuits that people are *bent on* are almost always negative or unpleasant in some way" (ibid.:166). Yet in the concordance there are plenty of positive-looking pursuits that people are bent on, for example *achievement, demanding greater and greater protection, doing good, expiating the great Fascist guilt, finding a beauty, getting fit, helping his fellow man, recreation, seeking the comfortable security, sincerity, success,* and there are many others which do not sound unpleasant such as *business, change, escaping, going that way, its early despatch, some purpose, those 700 acres.* Indeed the indisputably unfavourable co-occurrences are in reality quite thin on the ground in the selection in question.

The percentage of occurrences with unfavourable lexis in the immediate environment appears to be significantly higher for *SNOBBISH* than for *BENT ON*. A further difference is that whereas *BENT ON* has its unpleasant co-occurrences mostly to the right of the node, *SNOBBISH* does not appear to have this restriction, with 'unpleasantries' occurring abundantly to both left and right. Finally, the *SNOBBISH* concordance bears out Channell's (1999:44) observation (quoted previously) apropos the clustering of negative items and a "mutually supporting web of negative words", in that many of the lines feature several negative co-occurrences.

Naturally this very brief comparison leaves a number of questions open. Firstly, it may be that *SNOBBISH* and *BENT ON* are not sufficiently representative as terms of comparison. Secondly, there is too great a reliance on hasty semantic categorisations of co-occurrences into

positive, negative and neutral (see 5.3.1 for further discussion of this). However, the impression is that the co-text flanking *SNOBBISH* is on the whole more unpleasant than the co-text of *BENT ON*, which at times actually sounds quite upbeat. It could therefore be argued that *SNOB-BISH*, notwithstanding the fact that it indisputably belongs to the category of attitudinal lexis and is thus not in any way semantically neutral,

Table 2.2   Concordance to 'bent on' in Louw 1993 (Alphabetical Sorting at R1)

1. in a society hell	*bent on*	achievement. Mutable thinkers don't
2. werful enchanter,	*bent on*	bringing Arthur to his ruin this dev
3. iding donkeys all	*bent on*	business, they were forcibly impress
4. cter development.	*bent on*	change, even to the point of shatter
5. r world she seems	*bent on*	conquering. Well, I suppose that you
6. am presently hell	*bent on*	courting you. 'Very well then listen
7. overnment is hell	*bent on*	demanding greater and greater
8. of Yoller's wood,	*bent on*	destroying all survivors before purs
9. he people who are	*bent on*	doing good they can be the danger, s
10. stic savagery and	*bent on*	engulfing and drowning trapped men a
11. sonal safety and	*bent on*	escaping not only the enemy, but the
12. seen seems hell	*bent on*	expiating the great Fascist guilt. H
13. marriage, he was	*bent on*	finding a beauty if, while out walki
14. one else is hell	*bent on*	getting fit, I might as well join in
15. and one twitcher	*bent on*	glory crossed the razor backed rock
16. pass but he was	*bent on*	going that way, the shortest way, to
17. lish countrywoman	*bent on*	good works and the continuance of tr
18. , who really was	*bent on*	helping his fellow man, and who was
19. e mine, patently	*bent on*	its early despatch and eager to witn
20. hy was I so hell	*bent on*	locking myself up in a hotel in orde
21. er as if I was	*bent on*	making me see the Host clearly, then
22. le making youths	*bent on*	mischief coming along my previous pa
23. y. He seems hell	*bent on*	owning all of Colorado'. Fancy findi
24. d and fast as if	*bent on*	placing an irrevocable distance betw
25. came, but people	*bent on*	recreation had a much narrower idea
26. e Derby, who was	*bent on*	resigning, that in the interests of
27. ish battleships,	*bent on*	revenge for the sunken Hood in the s
28. lear you're hell	*bent on*	ruining yourself'. And he walked out
29. s they were hell	*bent on*	seeking the comfortable security of
30. to an apprentice	*bent on*	sincerity this multiplicity of inter
31. n of individuals	*bent on*	some purpose on which they all agree
32. the 7th is hell	*bent on*	success it can be totally destroyed,
33. he fools were so	*bent on*	taking over the national government
34. f dead but still	*bent on*	these 700 acres in the sea. There is
35. ut why he seemed	*bent on*	tripping up the deal with all that m
36. Tartar cavalry,	*bent on*	villainy. After which much happened

is a far stronger candidate for (an unfavourable) semantic prosody than *BENT ON*, precisely because semantic prosody is so contingent upon an item's lexical environment.

2.2.3   Disclosure

Despite the arguments outlined in the section above, the fact remains that within the framework of semantic prosody as it is usually described in the literature, the lexical environments of *SNOBBISH, POMPOUS, SELF-IMPORTANT* etc. excite scarcely any interest at all. Such terms are instantly recognised as unpleasant, so any claim that they are associated with a prosody of unpleasantness, though in theory perfectly defensible, would be considered unremarkable because there is no 'revelation' or disclosure as such, there is no concealed subtext. In other words, the unpleasant prosody would not be sufficiently hidden to warrant serious investigation.

In the BNC the term *DECKCHAIR* (*deck chair* is also present in the corpus, but I focus on the former) has (mostly) left-hand co-occurrences which include *asleep*, *lazing*, *reclining*, *fallen asleep*, *settled down*, *settling back*, *plonked himself*, and (mostly) right-hand occurrences which include *at sunset*, *at the front*, *in Japan*, *in the back garden*, *in the front garden*, *in the sun*, *on the outfield*, *on the sea front*, *under the tree*. It would seem justifiable to infer from this that *DECKCHAIR* has a semantic preference of something like 'relaxing outdoors', and from this one might wish to infer a positive, favourable prosody, but as things stand in the literature, this type of inference would probably not be taken seriously because it is too intuitively transparent. Indeed one wonders if *SNOBBISH* and *DECKCHAIR*, notwithstanding their distinctively unfavourable/favourable profiles, would be eligible for semantic prosody at all.

If discoveries were made to the effect that certain items with a strongly positive basic meaning, such as *BREATHTAKING*, had habitually unfavourable co-text, and that certain items with a strongly negative basic meaning, such as *LOUSY*, had habitually favourable co-text, then that really would be news and could represent stimulating avenues of research. (In actual fact it could be claimed that such a discovery has already been made, though it might have the effect of backfiring upon certain interpretations of semantic prosody rather than lending weight to them—see 4.4.) Perhaps the closest we have come to this scenario is (i) Sinclair's analysis (1996a:89–90) of *TRUE FEELINGS*, an expression which would intuitively be regarded as signifying something positive, i.e., 'genuine sentiments', but which, according to Sinclair's findings (see Section 1.1.4), is actually characterised by a prosody of 'reluctance', i.e., a reluctance to express sentiments, and (ii) the analyses by both Tognini-Bonelli (2001:106–110) and Stubbs (2001a:156–159) of *PROPER*, with

its prosody of 'absence' or 'lack', since *PROPER*, it is claimed, is usually part of an extended unit of meaning which is a "complaint for the absence of something that we all think should be present or available" (Tognini-Bonelli 2001:110). However, reluctance to express one's true feelings is not necessarily a bad thing, and is in any case very much culture-dependent, so a contrast here between a very positive basic meaning and a very negative prosody might be less cogent as a result, while the prosody inferred for *PROPER*, though extremely insightful, perhaps asks as many questions as it answers (see 4.3.1).

However that may be, up to now semantic prosody has been discussed only when there is some type of disclosure or revelation, only when something which apparently lies beneath the surface is 'extracted' (see Xiao and McEnery 2006:106) from the corpus data. If this is the objective, then semantically non-neutral words such as *PRIGGISH* or *MAGNIFICENT* are unlikely candidates for semantic prosody. All this ties in with a question raised by Schmitt and Carter (2004:8–9): "it seems clear that formulaic sequences can carry semantic prosody, but to our knowledge no one has done research into how many do and how many do not".

This in turn raises the question of whether all lexical items are potential candidates for semantic prosody.

2.2.4   Can Semantic Prosody be Inferred for All Lexical Items?

It might be contested that my concern with the distinction between items which have a markedly positive or negative basic meaning and those which do not is something of a red herring. Surely, the argument might run, we can resolve the question by affirming that all lexical items, with the possible exception of grammatical words, have potential for semantic prosody—whether hidden or not—and that it is only natural that scholars should devote their attention to cases where the prosody is less manifest. This argument is in itself unexceptionable. Firstly, the idea that lexical items across the board are candidates for semantic prosody appears to be supported by Hoey's theory of priming: "I would hypothesise that all words are primed for one or more collocations, semantic associations and colligations, even if these are on the face of it unremarkable" (Hoey 2005:116). In similar vein, Stubbs (2001a:225) underlines that "there are always semantic relations between nodes and collocates", while Louw (2000:51) talks of the potential for discovering forms of prosodic behaviour even with high-frequency grammatical items such as *a*.

Secondly, it is indeed perfectly natural that scholars should wish to focus upon less obvious or more subliminal instances of prosodies. However, there is a theoretical drawback, which is that in many works on the subject the hidden quality of semantic prosody is presented *as part of its definition*, as one of its central features. Indeed a glance through the definitions/

explanations of semantic prosody reported in Chapter 1 would suggest that if the meaning in question is not concealed in some way, then it cannot be classified as a prosody.

Why this should be so, however, is not clear. The only implied argument in support of it is a circular one. Why is semantic prosody hidden, covert, not visible to the naked eye? Well, because if it weren't hidden, it wouldn't be semantic prosody. The point is crucial, precisely because this supposedly hidden quality has been presented as being so fundamental. If it could be established that *all* lexical items are equal as regards their potential association with prosodies, and that prosodies are not necessarily hidden, then it might emerge, in studies on semantic prosody so far, that some items are more equal than others.

2.3   SUMMARY

It was emphasised in Chapter 1 that the term 'semantic prosody' has been adopted in the literature in connection with a number of different phenomena, and certainly semantic prosody as a concept has been assigned a broad range of characteristics. This chapter has tried to identify those characteristics which would appear to be common to all descriptions of semantic prosody. It is claimed that two features are almost always mentioned by scholars: (i) its attitudinal function and (ii) its hidden quality.

However, even with regard to these two features, significant differences emerge. A number of authors define the attitudinal function of semantic prosody in connotative terms, but the attribute of secondary meaning so often ascribed to connotation conflicts with the notion promoted by other scholars that semantic prosody has a central, pivotal role within the unit of meaning. In the same way, for most scholars the supposedly hidden quality of semantic prosody is so crucial that it actually constitutes part of the definition of this concept, while for other scholars this is not the case.

Furthermore, I have argued (i) that semantic prosody is not always characterised by attitudinal function—in some of the examples of semantic prosody provided in the literature there is no obvious expression of attitude, and (ii) that it is not sufficiently clear why semantic prosody needs to be regarded as hidden anyway. It could be contested that words such as *SELF-IMPORTANT*, where the negative evaluation is more transparent, are as much a candidate for semantic prosody as *COMMIT* and *SYMPTOMATIC OF*. This raises the question of whether or not *all* words/expressions might qualify for prosodies of some description.

3   The Diachronic and the Synchronic

Company, villainous company, hath been the spoil of me

3.0   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 examined two features which seem to be common to almost all descriptions of semantic prosody, although some points of contrast emerged. In this and the following chapter the focus will be on differences rather than similarities, i.e., features which are present in some accounts but which are absent or at least given much less emphasis in others. The current chapter deals with semantic prosody in connection with diachronic and synchronic aspects. Of critical importance in this context is the nature of the 'unit' with which semantic prosody is frequently associated.

3.1   SEMANTIC PROSODY: DIACHRONIC ASPECTS[1]

Most definitions and descriptions of semantic prosody, be they detailed accounts or just passing references, embrace the idea that prosodic meaning is somehow attached or transferred to an item, the process of attachment/transfer usually being expressed in metaphorical terms. It will be argued later that the process described rests squarely upon diachronic assumptions.

3.1.1   Semantic Prosody is Attached Meaning

The notion that semantic prosody attaches itself to a word is a common one, and is expressed by a broad range of metaphors in the literature (these are italicised in this and in the following section). Hunston and Thompson, in their 'Editors' Introduction' to Channell (1999:38) state that "a given word *takes on* an association with the positive, or, more usually, the negative" (see 1.1.7 for the full quotation). The same metaphor is adopted by Hunston (2002:141—see again 1.1.7), and by Tribble (2000:86), who asserts that "the local semantic prosody of 'experience' in PP results from the predominant association it *takes on* in this environment" (as noted

in 1.2.1, 'PP' is a corpus of project proposals submitted to the European Union's PHARE programme). Also to be found is the notion of a word *taking* semantic prosody (Ooi 1998:62).

Semantic prosody may not only be 'taken on', but also 'attached' or 'acquired'. Hunston (2002:141) gives *SIT THROUGH* as an example of a lexical item to which semantic prosody may be assigned, remarking that "because it is often used with items that indicate something lengthy and boring, connotations of boredom tend to *attach* to the phrasal verb itself", and Coffin and O'Halloran (2006:91) note that semantic prosody *attaches* to phrases, while Stubbs (1995:51), discussing *CAUSE*, argues that "*CAUSE acquires* guilt by association. At some point the word itself *acquires* unpleasant connotations". Also with reference to *CAUSE*, Bublitz (1996:11–12) writes that "constant association (through collocation) of *CAUSE* with clearly unpleasant, negative words could, at some point, result in the word itself *acquiring* unpleasant, negative connotations".

The notion of attached or acquired meaning is reinforced by metaphors involving *auras* (Louw 1993:157) and *halos* (Bublitz 1996:9, 27), which might be construed as hovering beatifically around the main body of the word without being fully integrated (but see 3.4).

3.1.2   Semantic Prosody is Transferred Meaning

The assumption that meanings are 'attached', 'taken on', or 'acquired' would suggest that they have arrived from elsewhere, and there is no doubt that the idea of semantic transfer is crucial to a great many descriptions of semantic prosody. It is summarised by Bublitz (1996:11) as follows: "We know from lexical semantics that constantly using a word in the same kind of context can eventually lead to a shift in its meaning: the word *adopts* semantic features from an adjacent item". The "shift" mentioned by Bublitz is sometimes considered to be the result of *infection*. Ullmann (quoted by Louw 1993:159) recalls Bréal's (1897) notion of *contagion*:

> Habitual collocations may permanently affect the meaning of the terms involved; by a process known since Bréal as '*contagion*', the sense of one word may be *transferred* to another simply because they occur together in many contexts.
>
> (Ullmann 1962:185)

Ullmann (ibid.) then provides an example of this:

> Among its widespread ramifications, Latin 'persona' has become a negative particle in French. This change is due to purely linguistic reasons: contiguity with the negative particle *ne* has '*infected*' this word, in the same way as *rem*, *passim*, *punctum*, by a process which Bréal has termed '*contagion*'.

Louw (1993:159) goes along with this, adding that "'contagion' is a general linguistic phenomenon which pervades every type of language", and adds later (ibid.:164) that "prosodies are undoubtedly the product of a long period of refinement through historical change" (see also Louw 2005, Section 2). Sinclair (1996b:101) alludes briefly to the idea that words adopt "some of the meaning of their surroundings through contagion", and we have seen (1.1.9) that according to Partington (1998:76), "the more frequently *green* collocates with *fundamentalist* the more *tainted* the former is likely to become".

In similar vein, Bublitz (1996:11) refers to Leech's (1981:16) observation that the meaning of items co–occurring with any given word *rubs off* on that word, creating what Leech calls *reflected meaning*, while various authors refer to the notion of the *colouring* of a word, for example McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006:84):

> As the Chinese saying goes, 'he who stays near vermilion gets *stained* red, and he who stays near ink gets *stained* black'—one *takes on the colour* of one's company—the consequence of a word frequently keeping 'bad company' is that the use of a word alone may become enough to indicate something unfavourable.

Adolphs and Carter (2002:11) observe that "semantic prosodies are also an aspect of '*shading*' or '*colouring*' in discourse" (see also Adolphs 2006:10, 69), while according to Munday (forthcoming), a semantically neutral form can be affected by co–occurrences "that give it a particular *hue*". Chromatic metaphors are also present in Louw (1993:158–159), Bublitz (1996:9) and Tribble (2000:88). Further, Louw (ibid.) takes the view that forms can be *imbued* by their collocates, while Hunston (2001:20–21) states that Louw uses the term semantic prosody "to indicate a meaning which *accords* to a word because of the environment in which it is usually found".

Finally, the element of transfer is also attendant upon Sinclair's (1996b:115) reference to a "*spillover* of meaning" between words. Further recurrent metaphors in the literature are those of semantic prosody being *carried* (e.g., Tognini-Bonelli 2001:111, Cotterill 2001:296, Schmitt and Carter 2004:8, Adolphs 2006:57) or *held* (Baker 2006:107) by a word or phrase.

3.1.3   Transferable Meaning

Thus according to the metaphors we find in the literature, prosodic meaning may be attached, be taken on, be taken, be acquired, be accorded, be carried or be held; it may imbue, colour, taint, rub off, be reflected or spill over; further, prosodic meaning is an aura, a halo, a shade or a hue, and is the result of infection or contagion. Most of these—whether this is stated explicitly or simply implied—suggest a shift of meaning during the course of time from one word to another. It is also worth noting that even in passing

references to semantic prosody, i.e., where the concept is briefly defined but not examined or discussed, the positioning of semantic prosody within a diachronic framework may be taken for granted. Scott and Thompson, in their 'Editors' Introduction' to Hunston (2001:13–14), write the following: "Another key concept . . . is that of semantic prosody: the fact that certain words and phrases have become associated, through repeated use, with negative or positive contexts".

Whitsitt (2005:288–293) was the first to note, in the context of semantic prosody, the substantial number of metaphors implying a transfer of something from one form to another, usually over an unspecified period of time. This 'something', he underlines, is in metaphorical terms often either liquid or infection (though the combination *imbue/aura* also has something of the spiritual), whereas in non-metaphorical terms, what is transferred must be meaning.

The diachronic considerations suggested by the metaphors discussed are stated explicitly in certain contributions. Bublitz (1996:12), discussing Stubbs' (1995:50) hypothesis that the lemma *CAUSE*, owing to increasing co-occurrence with predominantly unpleasant company, has developed a much more negative meaning than it once had, stresses the need to verify this in earlier and present-day texts, i.e., to investigate whether or not the unfavourable co-occurrences of *CAUSE* have in fact increased over the decades/centuries (see 1.1.3).

In other words, if we were to go back in time and establish that, for instance, in nineteenth-century English *CAUSE* did not have negative meaning and did not co-occur with prevalently unpleasant company, then the diachronic argument would benefit from some important empirical support. Frustratingly—inasmuch as the metaphors discussed privilege diachronic rather than synchronic aspects—in the literature such support is conspicuous by its absence. Stubbs (1995:50) remarks that more systematic diachronic data might be able to shed some light on the issue, but takes this no further. Whitsitt (2005:302, note 9), however, goes on to argue that even if there were such empirical evidence this would perforce prove inconclusive, i.e., even if one were able to establish that *CAUSE*, at an earlier stage of language, used to have a meaning which was neither particularly good nor bad, then co-occurred frequently with bad company, and, at a later *état du langue*, developed an unpleasant meaning, this would still not constitute proof that a transfer of meaning had taken place from one form to another. It is thus claimed that the hypothesis is unprovable.

It should be emphasised that Whitsitt's objections do not contest the idea that the meanings of words are subject to gradual change—the word *gay* is a topical example, since its meaning has altered relatively recently. Nor—as far as I understand—does he take issue with the idea that the typical co-text of a word will change as the word's meaning changes—it can safely be assumed that the habitual co-text of *gay* is now markedly different by comparison with 50 years ago. But the implication in a great

many descriptions of semantic prosody seems to be that alterations in the co-text took place *first*, and that these *subsequently* affected the meaning of the word—something which raises the contentious question of why the alterations in a word's co-text came about at all. (Note that this kind of unidirectional meaning transfer is not necessarily implied when we think of the semantic evolution of *gay*: the meaning of this word has changed, its typical co-text has changed. But this does not mean that the co-text must have changed first, i.e., that the modern meaning of *gay* was 'received' from its habitual co-text.)

The process of meaning transfer as presented in descriptions of semantic prosody tends to imply that a word such as *UTTERLY*, which commonly qualifies unpleasant-sounding adjectives and adverbs (see Louw 1993:160–161—in the corpus used by Louw these include *arid*, *confused*, *demolished*, *insensible*, *meaningless*, *ridiculous*, *terrified*, *unreasonable*, *unsympathetic*), was infected by its unpleasant environment but apparently did not return the compliment. Now although theories of language change tell us that words interact constantly and reciprocally over time, the notion that *UTTERLY* might originally have been one of the bad guys, gradually transmitting turpitude to its habitual co-occurrences, does not appear to be contemplated in explanations of semantic prosody (see again Whitsitt 2005:295–296).

Hunston (2007:266) provides some important insights on the issue of the 'transfer' of attitudinal meaning from one context to another. With reference to Teubert (2003—but see also Teubert 2007), she points out that arguably meaning does not exist except in context, in which case it would seem illogical to postulate that a word can transfer its meaning from one context to another. It would be sufficient to say, the author continues, that a word such as *CAUSE* often appears in contexts of unfavourable situations but not always. At the same time, Hunston reminds us that even if meaning may not be transferable from one text to another, there are "resonances of intertextuality", which enable us, for instance, to interpret *cause a fire* differently from *light a fire*. Along similar lines, Hoey (2005:23), commenting on Whitsitt's observations, writes that

> the difference is not as great as Whitsitt thinks between saying that *cause* (for example) is negative because its collocates are characteristically negative (a position which Whitsitt correctly identifies as unsustainable) and saying that because the co-texts of *cause* are characteristically negative we may interpret negatively those co-texts that are on the face of it neutral.

Hunston (2007:266) sums up the situation as follows:

> The dilemma, then, is that the notion of 'transferring' attitudinal meaning from the majority of instances to a single instance sometimes

works very well in explaining interpretations of that single instance. In other cases it is irrelevant. To say that a word cannot possibly carry an attitudinal meaning from one context to another is to deny an explanation of much implied meaning. On the other hand, to argue that this necessarily happens always, just because it clearly often happens, is equally misleading.

Interestingly, diachronic considerations in the literature on semantic prosody very often rest upon the notion that *SET IN*, *UTTERLY* etc. were once semantically neutral (see 2.2.1), but proved easy prey to the unpleasantness of their habitual co-text (crucially, as will be explained in 4.4, other words appearing habitually in bad company seem perfectly at ease in that company, apparently able to resist infection). Notable in this respect is that in the vast majority of cases examined, semantic prosody is unpleasant rather than pleasant, the result of mixing with bad rather than good company.

3.1.4   The Badge of Lost Innocence

In studies on semantic prosody there are comparatively few lexical items for which favourable prosodies have been claimed. These include: *DISCOVERIES, EXPRESSION, MUTUAL* (Stubbs 2001a:107); *CAREER, LAUNCH* (Stubbs 2001b:459); *FLEXIBLE* (Tognini-Bonelli 2001:21–24); and a positive 'polarity' is claimed for *OFF THE BEATEN TRACK* (Channell 1999:50–51). The overwhelming preponderance of unfavourable prosodies is accounted for by Louw (2000:52) in the following way:

> In the same way that unrequited love forms most of the subject matter for the greatest love poetry in English and not requited love (with the superb exception of John Donne's *The Good Morrow*), we ought not to be surprised to find that contented human beings utter much less than discontented ones.

This explanation has a strongly literary feel, and in any case Louw might change his mind if he were to meet my strongly non-literary next-door neighbour, capable of banging on for hours about the virtues of his garden. However, Louw may well be right. Channell (1999:55), for example, recalls that during the writing of the *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary*, "compilers noted more than double the number of negatively loaded words to positively loaded ones" (though this may be due to the fact that, as Channell points out (ibid.), the compilers "were more sensitive to negative items because the social consequences of an error with a negative item are much greater than those arising from the misuse of a positive item"), while Partington (2004a:133) speculates that "humans have a greater tendency or need to communicate to each other the 'bad things' which happen in life and this could be reflected in texts".

Be that as it may, what is especially striking in this respect is the notion, apparently promoted or at least tacitly accepted by many scholars, that the form to which a negative prosody is attributed was originally 'innocent' or 'neutral' but subsequently veered off the straight and narrow path on account of its bad company. The whole idea of the morally good or at least morally average person falling into bad company seems to be irresistibly alluring and has something of the folkloristic about it, being a staple ingredient, for example, of stories and fairy tales (*Oliver Twist*, *Pinocchio*, *Snow White*, *Hansel and Gretel* etc.). Whitsitt (2005:292) relates this to "an organising myth, as old as it is tritely formulaic, of the fall from innocence into a world of bad company".

Perhaps it is this, along with the tantalising notion that these corrupted forms (e.g., *UTTERLY, SET IN*), now irreversibly contaminated, will, vampire-like, go out into the world and taint other innocent parties (through usage such as *utterly perfect*, or *their marriage has set in*), which explains the prioritising of 'bad' semantic prosodies. While the triumph of good over bad is edifying, à la *Beauty and the Beast* (Belle's beauty and goodness remain untainted by the Beast, whom she actually manages to 'reform'), it is Dracula that captures the imagination.

It may be for this reason that the opposite scenario, i.e., the notion of 'bad' or 'neutral' forms being morally *improved* by *good* company has aroused little interest. That is, the idea that a form such as *PROVIDE*, considered to be characterised by a 'good' prosody, was originally 'bad' or 'neutral', but subsequently improved after mixing with morally decent co-occurrences, (*services*, *assistance*, *comfort*) is never pursued. Nor is the idea that the now reformed *PROVIDE* could then 'spread the word' (see 3.3.2 on the notion of 'spreading') and edify others, exerting a good influence on its bad co-occurrences.

The diachronic dimension is clearly important and extremely recurrent in descriptions of semantic prosody, though one might argue that it is never entirely central. Most of the authors cited in this chapter make only passing references to diachronic aspects, since their interests lie elsewhere—Louw, for example, is concerned with the subliminal role of semantic prosody and with irony; Stubbs is concerned with its functional role in discourse. Indeed discussions of semantic prosody are as a rule synchronic in nature. What is striking, however, is that notwithstanding a prevalently synchronic orientation in terms of the way the *analyses* are carried out (using synchronic corpora), the *definitions* and *descriptions* of semantic prosody provided by authors are often couched in terms which are primarily diachronic. A cursory look back at the explanations given in the metaphorical terms of attaching, acquiring, imbuing etc. reveals that these are almost all framed in diachronic terms, but diachronic *analyses* of the topic are entirely absent in the literature.

This seems to me a theoretical discrepancy and one which is potentially disorienting for the reader in search of information on the subject. Whitsitt

(2005:287–288) goes so far as to claim that this discrepancy alone would be enough to dismiss the concept of semantic prosody as presented by certain scholars. But let us turn now to other descriptions where this conflation of diachronic and synchronic elements is not present.

3.2   SEMANTIC PROSODY: SYNCHRONIC ASPECTS

It was noted in 1.1.4 that Sinclair defines semantic prosody in pragmatic, functional terms, emphasising its quality (i) as a central, obligatory constituent of the unit of meaning, and (ii) its importance for theories of the co-selection of elements within that unit of meaning. Sinclair does not, however, define semantic prosody in diachronic terms. Certainly he makes the occasional reference to diachronic factors, notably in Sinclair 1996b (101), where he refers to Louw (1993), noting that "left to themselves, the meanings of words change by their frequent association with other words". And later in the same article (Sinclair 1996b:113), it is observed that "through the brutal clash of usage over the centuries, words have moved in meaning, and units of meaning have been forged consisting of more than one word". Yet he is also careful to point out that even if some of the processes of semantic change may seem obvious, "in a synchronic view of language, the origins of meaning are not under scrutiny" (ibid.:113).

Tognini-Bonelli (2001) operates very much within Sinclair's framework, offering a number of interesting examples of extended units of meaning, both in English and Italian. Although the author seems happy with Louw's definition of semantic prosody (Tognini-Bonelli 2001:111–112), her approach to semantic prosody and her examples of the extended unit of meaning in general (2001: *passim*) are entirely synchronic in nature.

As previously pointed out, almost all *analyses* of semantic prosody are in fact synchronic. Nevertheless, the notion of the 'unit' within which semantic prosody operates has been delineated in terms which seem to combine the synchronic and the diachronic.

3.3   DIACHRONIC AND SYNCHRONIC CONSIDERATIONS IN DESCRIPTIONS OF THE 'UNIT'

So far in this book several references have been made to Sinclair's unit of meaning. The notion of the 'unit', whether it be of meaning, of language or of discourse, is another recurrent feature in descriptions of semantic prosody. One has the impression, however, that it means different things to different scholars, and that its interpretation is contingent upon how much weight individual scholars give to diachronic and/or synchronic aspects.

In Chapter 1 it was noted that the term 'semantic prosody' achieved currency in Louw (1993), on the basis of a parallel with Firth's discussions of

prosody in phonological terms, and in particular the way sounds transcend segmental boundaries (see also Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1996:154–155 on the relevance of phonological prosody to semantic prosody). Firth's prosodic approach, which essentially rejected the phoneme as an adequate basis for phonological analysis, was, in the words of Palmer (1968:8), "not confined to the narrow segments of the phoneme but might extend beyond those segments to parts of the syllable, the word, or even the 'longer piece'". As exemplified in Chapter 1, the realisation of the phoneme /k/ is contingent upon the sounds which immediately precede and follow it. Thus the /k/ of *kangaroo*, for example, is different from the /k/ of *keep*, because during the realisation of the /k/ the mouth is already preparing for the production of the next sound. Therefore the articulation of the /k/ of *kangaroo* prepares for the production of /æ/ rather than /i:/ or any other sound, by a process of "phonological colouring" (Louw 1993:158). This process has been applied by analogy to the area of lexical semantics: a word such as *UTTERLY*, because it habitually appears in bad company, prepares the reader/hearer for something unpleasant. Louw (ibid.:158–159) adopts this analogy as the basis for his discussion of how the meanings of words can be influenced by their co-text:

> The nasal prosody in the word *Amen* would be an example: we find that the vowels are imbued with a nasal quality because of their proximity to the nasals *m* and *n*. In the same way, the habitual collocates of the form *set in* are capable of colouring it, so that it can no longer be seen in isolation from its semantic prosody, which is established through the semantic consistency of its subjects.

This analogy is refuted by Whitsitt (2005:291):

> One can easily see that as long as the vowels appear in the word *Amen*, they will surely be imbued by a nasal sound. But what happens when these same vowels appear with other consonants which do not have a nasal sound? Will the vowels still be coloured by a nasal sound? Or will the vowels, once they have been coloured by nasal sounds, only appear with nasal sounding consonants? Clearly the answer to both these questions is no. The vowels do not get permanently coloured with a nasal sound. This, however, is precisely what Louw claims for semantic prosody.

Moreover, for the analogy to hold, /m/ and /n/ would have to be regarded as "habitual collocates" of the vowels in question, in the way that, for example, *rot* and *cancer* are collocates of the phrasal verb *SET IN*. Now whereas one can accept that *rot* and *cancer* co-occur with *SET IN* more frequently than most other words do, it is by no means so easy to accept that /m/ and /n/ co-occur with the vowels of *Amen* more frequently than most other sounds do. Consonants such as /p/, /s/, /t/ would appear to be equally strong candidates.

The phonological colouring referred to by Louw is perhaps best described synchronically: the production of /k/ may vary according to the sounds which precede and follow it, but there would be no need to suggest that /k/ undergoes any sort of change in pronunciation over a period of time. Of course sounds *do* change over time (compare the /k/ of Latin *caelum* which has evolved to the /tʃ/ of Italian *cielo*), but this does not seem relevant to the analogy provided, precisely because it is untenable to posit that the vowels of *Amen* get permanently coloured with a nasal sound. Conversely, when the argument is switched to lexical semantics, the idea that the habitual co-occurrences of *SET IN* are "capable of colouring it" perhaps makes sense only if considered from a primarily diachronic point of view, because the process of semantic colouring, as described by Louw, is a gradual one which over time would alter the meaning of *SET IN*.

These observations seem to me particularly important because the influence of Louw's article upon subsequent contributions has been prodigious. From the author's parallel between phonological/semantic phenomena and from the process of the transcending of segmental boundaries has emerged the notion that semantic prosody is a feature which *extends* over a *unit* or *units* (my italics here and in the quotations which follow), and here too metaphors are recurrent. Bublitz (1996:9) affirms that "with prosody we refer to the fact that a feature *extends* its domain, *stretches* over and affects several *units*", something which (ibid.:9) "accords with Firth's idea that meaning is regularly *dispersed* in context". We have seen that Stubbs (2001a:65) defines 'discourse prosody' as "a feature which *extends* over more than one *unit* in a linear string", and that Partington (2004a:131–132) defines semantic prosody as a type of evaluative meaning which is "*spread* over a *unit* of language which potentially goes well beyond the single orthographic word". According to Munday (forthcoming), semantic prosody is "about the way that sense and connotation *spread* surreptitiously across collocates or from the typical surrounding co-text". Also worth noting is Sinclair's (2003:117) observation that semantic prosody "typically *ranges* over combinations of words in an utterance rather than being attached just to one".

It thus emerges that semantic prosody is a phenomenon/feature/meaning which extends/stretches/ranges/is spread/is dispersed either (i) over / across a(n extended) unit of meaning/unit of language/discourse unit, or (ii) over/ across more than one unit/several units.

This raises two questions: firstly, what is the nature of the unit(s) being discussed, and secondly what exactly is intended by the metaphors of stretching, spreading etc.?

3.3.1 The Nature of the Unit

From the above the resulting impression is that the 'unit' in question has different interpretations. Particularly noticeable is the conflict between 'unit' singular and 'units' plural: sometimes the unit appears to comprise a

single word, sometimes it represents a longer sequence, perhaps corresponding more closely to the sequences variously described in the literature as chunks, as multi-word items or as multi-word units (see Schmitt and Carter 2004:2–3, as well as Pawley and Syder 1983, Moon 1998, Hunston and Francis 1999:7–8, Wray 2002). As noted in 1.1.4, Sinclair's unit of meaning is certainly a longer sequence (see also Tognini-Bonelli (2002:76–79) for a summary of this), but the idea of semantic prosody extending across several *units*, or across *more than one unit* (see the quotations in the previous section), is distracting. Presumably these units correspond to something smaller than what Sinclair had in mind—in Bublitz, for example, there is an implied equivalence between units and words: after describing semantic prosody as a phenomenon which stretches over several units, the author adds (1996:9): "Thus, meaning resides not in a word but several words".

It should also be noted that semantic prosody has been associated not only with units of meaning (very occasionally in the literature one even receives the impression that semantic prosody itself is a unit, e.g. Dam-Jensen and Zethsen 2008:206), but also with units of discourse and units of language, something which again raises the question of just how extensive this unit is, and thus how far semantic prosody can 'stretch'. As Stubbs (2001b:460) points out, we need to know how to identify the boundaries of 'units' in texts, and how to define them as units in the vocabulary. In this chapter, however, my interest is in the notion of stretching, or extending over units, in relation to the diachronic/synchronic issue.

3.3.2   Spreading and Stretching: A Diachronic or Synchronic Phenomenon?

The first part of this chapter discussed the overlapping metaphors of attachment (taking on, acquiring, attaching etc.) and transfer (infection, contagion, staining, spilling over) commonly used to describe semantic prosody. The overlap is created by the common element of the *movement* of something from A to B, be it by acquisition or infection, and in the context of semantic prosody these metaphors are intended to represent the movement of meaning from one word to another. These are perforce to be construed as having diachronic relevance, i.e., such transfers of meaning presumably take place over a period of time.

However, with the metaphors referred to in the previous section—those of spreading, stretching, extending and ranging (over a unit or units)—the diachronic/synchronic question is less clear. Although they too, like the metaphors of attachment and transfer, would seem to entail in some way the idea of movement, and more specifically the movement of meaning, they are perhaps to be interpreted in a different way. It would perhaps make more sense to give these a synchronic reading, i.e., representing the idea that semantic prosody *is distributed over*, or better, *characterises* or *belongs to* a unit of meaning/language/discourse, with no particular

emphasis on the idea of movement. With this reading there would be no need to posit the idea of words changing meaning over time, or of meanings shifting or being passed on from one word to another. Thus when Stubbs (2001a:65) talks of "a feature which *extends* over more than one *unit* in a linear string", this would be interpreted as a feature which characterises a group of elements rather than a single element, and the metaphors of extending, spreading etc. would sit happily with the general observation that "meaning can be said to belong to whole phrases rather than single words" (Hunston 2002:142). The diachronic question would be another; it would lie upon a different axis.

To some readers this might seem self-evident, but establishing the presence or absence of the notion of movement is essential to the understanding of these metaphors. If one has the patience to check the definitions of the verbs *spread*, *stretch*, *extend* and *range* in dictionaries, one finds that the element of movement or shifting, so crucial to the diachronic interpretation, may be either present or absent. Spreading, stretching, extending or ranging over something may be read as 'occupying' or 'being distributed over' the area of that something, with no particular suggestion of movement. But they can also correspond to the idea of 'gradually moving over something', both spatially and, intriguingly, temporally—data in the *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary* tell us that people or things can spread, stretch, extend or range both (i) over an area—whether this means occupying an area ('an artificial reef stretching the length of the coast' (*Cobuild* 2009:1548)) or moving around that area ('if something spreads or is spread by people, it gradually reaches or affects a larger and larger area or more and more people' (*Cobuild* 2009:1514)), and (ii) over a period of time ('if an event or activity extends over a period of time, it continues for that time' (*Cobuild* 2009:548)).

For a more concrete illustration of this let us extract relevant meanings and examples of the entry *spread* in the *Cobuild* (2009:1514):

> Meaning 5: If something spreads or is spread by people, it gradually reaches or affects a larger and larger area or more and more people. *The industrial revolution which started a couple of hundred years ago in Europe is now spreading across the world. . . . the sense of fear spreading in residential neighbourhoods . . . He was fed-up with the lies being spread about him.*

> Meaning 6: If something such as liquid, gas or smoke spreads or is spread, it moves outwards in all directions so that it covers a large area. *Fire spread rapidly after a chemical truck exploded . . . A dark red stain was spreading across his shirt.*

> Meaning 7: If you spread something over a period of time, it takes place regularly or continuously over that period, rather than happening at one time. *There seems to be little difference whether you eat all your calorie allowance in one go, or spread it over the day.*

Meaning 5 suggests greater and greater extension over an area, and thus the notions of both 'occupying' and 'moving'; meaning 6 involves the idea of 'moving outwards'; meaning 7 suggests greater and greater extension over time.

Why is it important to distinguish the meanings of 'occupying' and 'moving' within the framework of descriptions of semantic prosody? I shall try to answer this question by examining extracts from a specific description, that of Partington (2004a:131–132). The author tells us that semantic prosody is "*spread* over a unit of language which potentially goes well beyond the single orthographic word" and that (1998:68) "the term 'prosody' is borrowed from Firth (1957), who uses it to refer to phonological colouring which *spreads* beyond segmental boundaries. Semantic prosody refers to the *spreading* of connotational colouring beyond single word boundaries".

These observations, if one considers the nature of Partington's work in general, are probably synchronic in nature, i.e., the idea is that semantic prosody belongs to or is distributed over a unit of language. However, it would be unsurprising if readers attempting to garner information about semantic prosody were not to appreciate this immediately. This is in part because the notion of spreading recalls precisely those metaphors adopted to describe *diachronic* phenomena. Firstly, as the *Cobuild* definitions convey, 'spreading' can describe a gradual movement or transfer of something from A to B over a period of time; secondly, things that spread spatially are typically liquid, gas or smoke, for example, stains spreading across shirts. Each of these call to mind the metaphors of imbuing, colouring and rubbing off privileged by diachronic considerations. Further, although the *Cobuild* entry makes no mention of this, the notion of 'spreading' is often associated with infection and contagion (*SPREAD* as verb or noun co-occurs 73 times (span 6:6) with *infection/infections* in the BNC), further metaphors recurrent along the diachronic axis. Indeed Partington's remark about words 'tainting' each other (3.1.2) must be diachronic in nature.

This is not to imply that the use of such metaphors is always ambiguous in works on semantic prosody. When Sinclair (2003:117) writes that semantic prosody "typically ranges over combinations of words", the risk of ambiguity is practically absent because the author's unit of meaning, so central to his descriptions of semantic prosody, is meticulously explained and is placed firmly within a synchronic framework. But many descriptions of semantic prosody, as implied earlier in this chapter, hover uneasily between the diachronic and the synchronic, with the result that metaphors of spreading, extending etc. may not help to clarify the situation.

3.4   METAPHORS IN LANGUAGE DESCRIPTION

In this chapter there has been abundant reference to the consistent presence of metaphors in descriptions of semantic prosody. It should be stressed that

no general objection is being made here to the use of metaphor in descriptions of language phenomena, of which there is a rich and successful history in linguistic theory, or indeed to the pervasiveness of metaphor in general. Yet what is so striking in the literature on corpus linguistics is that the mere mention of semantic prosody suffices to trigger a cluster of metaphorical allusions to auras, imbuing, colouring, contagion, spreading, stretching etc., which would themselves appear to be the outcome of some form of infectious proliferation, since they are passed on from one contribution to the next. So much so that it is something of a rarity to run across descriptions of semantic prosody which do *not* include such metaphors (Fox 1998, for instance, does not include them).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, most descriptions of semantic prosody in the literature are relatively brief, just a short section in works devoted to broader themes such as corpora in the classroom, corpora in discourse analysis, or corpus linguistics *tout court*, but some of these brief descriptions are presented *almost exclusively* in terms of such metaphors, with scarce reference to the language phenomenon underlying them. Now while it is perfectly true that unexplained metaphors are everywhere in language (newspaper articles regarding, for example, sport and finance are full of them), it should be borne in mind that semantic prosody is a relatively new concept and as such requires careful elaboration. Hoey (2005) exploits metaphor liberally in his account of lexical priming (nesting, drifting, cracks in the priming, as well as priming itself), but ensures that the reader stays with him all the way by explicating each of these in turn. His metaphors, I believe, fulfil their function, which is that of clarification. Whether this is the case in certain descriptions of semantic prosody is debatable.

3.4.1   Semantic Prosody: A Coat of Many Colours

A central claim in this chapter is that readers confronted with the metaphors of infection and spreading associated with semantic prosody may be wrong-footed by them, uncertain as to whether such metaphors are intended to denote diachronic or synchronic phenomena, but other examples of equivocal metaphors could be cited. For instance, we have seen that within Sinclair's framework semantic prosody is absolutely primary and central to the unit of meaning, and can represent the reason for making the utterance, and that other authors favour the notion of semantic prosody as an 'aura', 'halo', 'shade' or 'hue' of meaning. To me such metaphors suggest that the meaning in question is essentially secondary to the basic meaning of a word, and this would be in marked contrast with Sinclair's description. Yet I may have misconstrued the metaphors, and indeed I was once pulled up by a corpus linguistics colleague who did not regard 'aura' as suggesting secondary meaning at all. Hence one could argue that these metaphors are ambiguous—and from this derives the intentional ambiguity of the metaphor contained in the title of this paragraph. Is a 'coat', i.e.,

the way one dresses, absolutely central to the understanding of the wearer, or is it purely secondary, only partly connected with the wearer's principal character traits?

3.5   DIACHRONY AND SYNCHRONY: CONCLUDING REMARKS

It seems important to keep diachronic and synchronic considerations separate, though of course semantic prosody may legitimately be approached along either of the two axes. Within a synchronic framework, the Firthian notion of the crossing of segmental boundaries provides a springboard for the hypothesis that meaning is distributed across units or groups of words rather than in single words. A diachronic approach, on the other hand, could try to establish how the meaning of the unit changes over the years or centuries, or it could investigate how words bestow meanings upon each other over time within that unit. An undeclared conflation of the two is perhaps best avoided, as is the widespread method of briefly introducing and defining semantic prosody as the result of a diachronic phenomenon, and then actually analyzing it in synchronic terms with synchronic corpora.

3.6   SUMMARY

The main claim in this chapter is that in the literature the concept of semantic prosody has been associated with two processes, one diachronic in nature, the other synchronic in nature. Sinclair describes semantic prosody using synchronic criteria, while most other authors approach the subject using both diachronic and synchronic criteria, with scarcely any acknowledgement that a single appellation (semantic prosody) has been adopted to denote distinct phenomena. Diachronic explanations tend to have a predilection for metaphorical language, and to favour the folkloristic notion of good being contaminated by evil. The corpora used to provide evidence of semantic prosody, however, have always been synchronic.

A conflation of diachronic and synchronic is manifest in the way some authors (for instance Ooi 1998:62, Cotterill 2001:292) take both Louw and Sinclair as the main 'voices' in the area of semantic prosody, without calling attention to the fact that the two scholars have dealt with this topic in very different ways. Of critical importance in this context is the nature of the 'unit', which appears to have been explained within both a synchronic and a diachronic framework.

4   Semantic Prosody and Lexical Environment

No word is an island

4.0   INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 considered two characteristics of semantic prosody (its evaluative quality and its hidden quality) which would appear to be common to all accounts of it. Chapter 3 examined features of relevance to diachrony and synchrony whose presence and emphasis vary substantially from one contribution to the next. The latter part of Chapter 3 concerned itself with the notion of meaning spreading and stretching across a unit or units, something which ties in directly with the question of the range of action of semantic prosody, i.e., how far can it 'stretch' and how large is the unit in question? With this in mind, in the current chapter I shall identify a further difference among studies on semantic prosody—the question of whether it characterises a longer sequence such as Sinclair's unit of meaning, or whether it belongs to a unit which is no broader than the word.

4.1   LEXICAL ENVIRONMENT

Arguably the most compelling argument in favour of semantic prosody as presented in the literature is its powerful dependence upon lexical environment. As we have seen, the striking aspect of the lexical surrounds of, for instance, *SET IN* and *BREAK OUT* is the undesirable nature of the vast majority of their (grammatical) subjects, and this is why these two verbs are considered to be associated with unpleasant prosodies. The prosody of 'reluctance' assigned to the unit of meaning containing *TRUE FEELINGS* is directly contingent upon its habitual co-occurrence with expressions such as *will never reveal*, *prevents me from expressing*, *less open about showing* (Sinclair 1996a:89). It might be argued that no other discourse phenomenon hinges so critically on the immediate lexical environment. Louw is well aware of the importance of this characteristic as a determiner of the distinctness of semantic prosody, and in particular as a way of differentiating it from connotation (see also 2.1.2):

> They [semantic prosodies] relate more directly to what literary critics call authorial *tone* and are supported by a series of collocates such as those mentioned earlier in Stubbs' analysis of *cause*. These are sufficiently monolithically negative for the introduction of a positive collocate, e.g. *joy*, to make a powerful adjustment to the *tone*: it becomes ironic if the choice of *joy* was deliberate or insincere if it was inadvertent. *The force behind SPs is more strongly collocational than the schematic aspects of connotation. Most SPs accumulate and concentrate their power within the nine-word window of acknowledged collocational force* [my italics].
>
> (Louw 2000:50)

The argument is a persuasive one (even if, as mentioned in 2.1.3, one might have reservations about the use of the term 'tone'); indeed it may be semantic prosody's major selling-point. However, if we wish to contend that semantic prosody is crucially dependent upon habitual lexical environment, then we need to define the nature of this dependence, and in order to do that we need in turn to examine exactly where item, habitual environment and semantic prosody stand in relation to each other.

4.2   THE LINK BETWEEN SEMANTIC PROSODY AND HABITUAL LEXICAL ENVIRONMENT

The main issue to be addressed here is whether semantic prosody is a feature of (i) the word alone, or (ii) word + co-text, i.e., the broader environment. (As pointed out in 1.1.4, I use respectively 'word' and 'unit of meaning' to distinguish the two.) I wish to consider these two alternatives by starting from some formulations typically used to describe semantic prosody in the literature.

Let us begin with the first alternative: that semantic prosody is a feature of the word alone. Consider the phrasing used in the following:

- "*utterly* has an overwhelmingly bad prosody" (Louw 1993:160)

- "*affect* has a clearly negative prosody" (Stubbs 1995:45)

- "the lemma *cause* has a strongly unfavourable prosody . . . the word *provide*, on the other hand, had a favourable prosody in the *Cobuild* corpus material" (Partington 1998:68)

- "we know that the English equivalent of *forårsage*, namely *cause*, has an overwhelmingly negative prosody" (Dam-Jensen and Zethsen 2007:1618)

- "The negative semantic prosody of *cause* has been widely observed"

    (Xiao and McEnery 2006:114)

Cotterill (2001) refers to "the SP of a word" (291) and to "the semantic prosodies of words" (293), though later (297) she assigns semantic prosody to "lexical items".

Although most of the authors who adopt this type of wording make at least some reference to the idea that semantic prosody 'extends / stretches etc. across a unit' (see 3.3), the way the previous statements are formulated—basically corresponding to 'word x has a prosody y'—gives the impression that semantic prosody belongs to the word alone rather than to the word and its co-text, i.e., an unpleasant prosody is a feature of, for instance, the word *UTTERLY*, but not of the phrase *utterly disgraceful* or a longer sequence. Partington (1998:67), commenting upon the lexical environment of *COMMIT* (in the sense of *perpetrate*, though this is not stated), writes: "The unfavourable connotation can be seen to reside not simply in the word *commit* but over a unit consisting of *commit* and its collocates (*offences*, *serious crime*, *foul* etc.)". However, in the following line we find: "Another *word* [my emphasis] which has an unfavourable semantic prosody is the adjective *rife*". The reader may be 'thrown' by the juxtaposition of these two observations because in the first, semantic prosody is projected as belonging primarily to a multi-word unit, whereas in the second the formulation adopted suggests that it belongs to the (node) word alone, and indeed it has been claimed (Hunston 2007:250) that Partington's discussion of the concept as a whole gives the impression that the latter view is prioritised. Contrast Partington's comments on *RIFE* with those of Schmitt and Carter (2004:8), according to whom "the formulaic sequence in which *rife* is embedded typically has the following structure: *SOMETHING UNDESIRABLE is/are rife in LOCATION/TIME*", where the reference is to the entire sequence in which *RIFE* appears rather than to *RIFE* alone.

The formula 'word x has a prosody y' is supported by the assertion in McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006:85) to the effect that that "semantic preference can be viewed as a feature of the collocates while semantic prosody is a feature of the node word".

It is my (probably controversial) view that 'word x has a prosody y' subtly rests on diachronic assumptions, because in the literature on semantic prosody this formula seems to entail that the meaning of the co-text has filtered through to the node word—a phenomenon which clearly does not happen overnight but over a considerably longer period of time. If we are informed—or at least if we receive the impression—that *UTTERLY* (alone) has an unpleasant prosody, if we are told that this word keeps and has kept consistently grisly company, and if we are confronted with metaphors of infecting, staining, tainting etc., then it may be only natural that we establish a connection between all these aspects, even where that connection is not made explicit, and to do that we are forced to posit a transmission of meaning from *UTTERLY's* unpleasant company to *UTTERLY* itself. (Unless of course we take the view that *UTTERLY* has always been 'bad', but in that case there would be no point in introducing the concept of

prosody, i.e., we could just as well claim that *UTTERLY* has always had a bad basic meaning, not a bad prosody.) In so doing we also conclude that the prosody in question, though described as belonging to the word alone, must have its origins in the word's co-text.

This would appear to be supported by many of the prosodies identi-fied in the literature, for example, those associated with: *BREAK OUT*, *HAPPEN*, *SET IN*, *BENT ON*, *SOMEWHAT*, *UTTERLY*, *PROVIDE*. All these have been assigned pleasant (*PROVIDE*) or unpleasant (the rest) prosodies, but in the actual descriptions of these prosodies barely any men-tion is made of the meaning of the node word. It is important to underline this: these prosodies of (un)pleasantness have been described with reference to the semantic traits of the respective co-texts but without any conspicu-ous reference to the basic meaning of the node itself, which proves to have scarcely any relevance to the description of the prosody.

Now let us turn to the second alternative: that semantic prosody is a fea-ture of both the node and the co-text. Within this framework a formula, for instance, of the type '*SIT THROUGH* has a prosody of frustration' would need to be re-stated as something along the lines of '*SIT THROUGH* is often part of a unit of meaning with a prosody of frustration at having to sit through something long and boring', and this type of formulation would move closer to that generally privileged by Sinclair, who more than anyone else has stressed the role of the unit of meaning. In the course of his analysis of *TRUE FEELINGS*, Sinclair does not make assertions to the effect that '*TRUE FEELINGS* has a prosody of reluctance-inability', preferring to assert (1996a:90) that this expression

> is the core of a compound lexical item which has the following inherent components:
>
>> a semantic prosody of reluctance-inability
>> a semantic preference of expression (and a strong colligation of
>>   a verb with the semantic preference)
>> a colligating possessive adjective
>> the core.
>
> So, not only are our true feelings our genuine emotions, but we use this particular collocation when talking about our reluctance to express them, even to ourselves. The collocation is almost never used except as part of this compound lexical item.

Notice that Sinclair's formulation (i) clarifies that the prosody belongs not simply to the expression *TRUE FEELINGS* but to the entire "com-pound lexical item" in which the expression occurs, and (ii) describes the prosody in terms which include both the meaning of the core item ("not only are our true feelings . . . ") and of the co-text (" . . . about our reluctance to

express them"). Elsewhere Sinclair formulates his observations along similar lines. With reference to *HAPPEN* as base form, he writes (2003:124) that "the main orientation of *happen* is the prospection of an unfortunate event happening; this often goes with expressions of doubt or vagueness". Once again the concept of 'happening' is an integral part of the prosody, the author does not confine himself to stating that *HAPPEN* has a bad prosody. This accords with his view (1996a:87–88) that "semantic prosody has a leading role to play in the *integration* of an item with its surroundings" [my italics]. Along the same lines is Sinclair's analysis (2004:175–176) of the unit of meaning containing *EFFORTS TO*. He explains that we talk of 'efforts to' do something

> when someone appears to be very unlikely to succeed, to be heading for failure, or already unsuccessful. In other words, the prosody that appears in almost every example is the speaker/writer's prejudgement of the efforts, that they are heading for failure (ibid.:175).

See also Sinclair's description of the prosody he associates with *BUDGE* in 4.3.1. Tognini-Bonelli (2001, 2002—see her description of *PROPER*, again in 4.3.1) also prefers this type of formulation in describing semantic prosody, generally avoiding the formula 'word x has a prosody y'.

In these cases both node and co-text play a critical role in the description of the prosody, which appears to rest primarily upon synchronic assumptions: simply, semantic prosody belongs to the entire unit of meaning, and that unit is selected by the speaker / writer *en bloc* on the basis of its global meaning. There is no suggestion here of the notion that semantic prosody belongs to the node but can be traced back to the co-text, or of the notion that meaning has passed during the course of time from the co-text to the node.

Some may take the view that with this identification of two different types of description I am simply splitting hairs, because in the end it all amounts to the same thing. An initial objection might be that although it is true that in the first type (semantic prosody belongs to a word rather than a sequence) the prosody derives from the meaning of the co-text and not from the meaning of the node word, it is equally true that the co-text is not left semantically empty after its meaning has been transferred. For this reason the prosody could still be considered a feature of both node and co-text, just as it is in the second type.

A second objection could be that my comments on the first formula—'word x has a prosody y'—constitute little more than a digression. After all, if a given scholar uses this formula, but at the same time specifies more generally that semantic prosody 'goes beyond' the node, or 'extends across' a broader unit, then it could be argued that the formula adopted simply represents a convenient abbreviation of a more cumbersome formula such as 'the combination of node x + its co-text has a prosody y', or 'the unit of meaning containing node x is characterised by a prosody y'.

A third possible objection is that it not necessarily the case that scholars adopting the formula 'word x has a prosody y' state or imply the relevance of transfers of meaning over time. Baker (2006:86–120) often uses this formula (e.g. (p.107), "the word *day* . . . holds a somewhat negative discourse prosody for being tired"), but makes no allusion to the idea of a transition of meaning from one form to another, though he does surmise the shifting of discourses over the years (e.g., p.91).

All this may be true, but if it is, one cannot help feeling that rather too much is being asked of the reader, who might struggle to make the appropriate distinctions. And the reader is not helped by the fact that, as noted in 1.1.4, the term 'lexical item' commonly refers both to a single word and to a sequence of words. Be that as it may, whether semantic prosody is considered to characterise word + co-text or the word alone, there are some awkward side effects, which will be dealt with in the sections which follow.

4.3   SEMANTIC PROSODY AS A FEATURE OF WORD + CO-TEXT

4.3.1   *PROPER* and Company

A genuinely interesting discovery in the field of semantic prosody is that some lexical items are associated with prosodies whose meaning is in marked contrast with the basic meaning of the node / core item in question. In 2.2.3 a brief reference was made to the analyses of *PROPER* by Tognini-Bonelli (2001:106–110) and Stubbs (2001a:156–159). In this case corpus data would suggest a prosody of what one might call an 'annoying absence of properness', because *PROPER* is often part of a unit of meaning which is a "complaint for the absence of something that we all think should be present or available" (Tognini-Bonelli 2001:110). So *PROPER* would appear to connect with, curiously, states of affairs which are unsatisfactory or, so to speak, 'improper'.

Stubbs (2001a:107) includes another example of this, though he does not label it as such. From his data the most frequent co-occurrences of the word *CREDIBILITY* are *lost*, *restore*, *gap*, *lack*, *problem*, *damaged*, *lose*, *undermine*. The impression from this is that credibility is more often than not impaired or absent, and needs to be regained. From this it could be hypothesised that *CREDIBILITY* typically appears in units of meaning involving 'lack of credibility', or 'no credibility'. Also of considerable interest in this respect is Sinclair's (1998:16–22) analysis of *BUDGE* (apparently as base form alone, though this is not stated). He provides (p.17) all 31 occurrences of *BUDGE* from a corpus of 20 million words (Table 4.1).

As the author points out (ibid.:16), "it would be difficult to find an instance of this word which is semantically positive". In this context

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Table 4.1   Concordance to 'budge' in Sinclair 1998

1. ight be out of his mind and refuse to	*budge*.	In that case, the Vice-President
2. ergencies. But Mr Volcker has yet to	*budge*	on changing his controls over domest
3. off scrubbers' hands before it would	*budge*.	It was rumoured to be make-work to
4. to do so, but she knew she could not	*budge*	me from my view. We spent several v
5. he recognizes it, he'll refuse to	*budge*	off that stool where he's sitting n
6. side, but still the snake will not	*budge*.	He keeps banging it on the head wi
7. away louder than ever. I wouldn't	*budge*	either, or come back, till a boy w
8. now. We won't none of us be able to	*budge*	tomorrow'. They sat at their tea
9. blow. The virus fanciers refused to	*budge*.	Whatever the diagnosis, my recove
10. sat in a corner; I determined not to	*budge*	from it until closing-time . I also
11. hen neither death nor ? disease could	*budge*	her. She wrote a cheque for more th
12. it with my shoulder, but it will not	*budge*.	I go to the backdoor. I find that
13. ng the following months and would not	*budge*	—'What's done cannot be undone
14. ooden door of the museum. It didn't	*budge*.	Hastily, I looked round for a bel
15. another snail near him he refused to	*budge*,	even in the mating season. I ofte
16. me into the dining room, refusing to	*budge*,	so that no-one else budged, and s
17. It was a dismissal. Bonasera did not	*budge*.	Finally, sighing, a good-hearted
18. 9° caliber pezzonovante. You can't	*budge*	him, not even with money. He has b
19. fternoons when the thermometer won't	*budge*	above minus twenty'. 'And those
20. be so heavy that two horses could not	*budge*	it even in moist earth. Although Wa
21. between the duellists and refuse to	*budge*.	Often to everyone's great relief
22. the coroner himself are gawn't'	*budge*	on that. In the first place, d
23. omise up to a point but he refuses to	*budge*	on design principles he knows to be
24. The humanity here just refuses to	*budge*'.	'That's ridiculous', says
25. out of the packet. When it did not	*budge*	he shook it more fiercely like 'a t
26. ed at the doorknobs the doors didn't	*budge*	or even rattle. 'Oh my God!'
27. and hesitated. He knew he couldn't	*budge*	Ben Canaan. He walked to the alcove
28. at they might, the British would not	*budge*	from their immigration policy. In m
29. pressure any delegation. They won't	*budge*	from that position'. 'What a ti
30. the wings of the eagle and refused to	*budge*.	After three thousand years of wait
31. tried the idea on him. He wouldn't	*budge*.	He seemed to have already faded aw

'positive' is presumably an evaluative epithet (see, however, 5.3.1.2 for a discussion of the meanings of 'positive' and 'negative' in studies on semantic prosody), but it is also true that there are consistently non-affirmative structures in the immediate environment of the node: *not*, words ending in *-n't*, *neither . . . nor*, as well as a strong collocation with the verbal lemma *refuse*. As a result Sinclair (ibid.:20) concludes:

> We consider why people use this word, why they do not just use the common verb *move*, with which any use of *budge* can be replaced. Something does not budge when it does not move *despite* attempts to move it. From the perspective of the person who wants something moved, this is frustrating and irritating, and these emotions may find expression, because this is the 'semantic prosody' of the use of *budge*.

Therefore (ibid.):

> we can claim that in the case of the use of *budge* the user wishes to express or report frustration (or a similar emotion) at the refusal or inability of some obstacle to move, despite pressure being applied.

These are invaluable and very precise observations, and we note once again the methodology of describing the prosody in terms which include the meaning of both node (*budge, moved, move*) and co-text (*refusal, frustration*). However, in considerably poorer terms one might be justified in translating such observations into a simpler, and certainly more succinct prosody of 'refusing to budge'. (See Stubbs 2006:25 on the question of reducing the "intricate assumptions" of certain prosodies—including the one Sinclair associates with *BUDGE*—to "simple semantic primitives"). If this move is in any way defensible, then we are confronted with three analogous cases: *PROPER*, associated with a prosody of 'properness/credibility being absent', *CREDIBILITY*, associated with a prosody of 'credibility being absent', and *BUDGE*, associated with a prosody of 'refusing to budge'. To these many others could be added. As described by Fox (1998:35–36), the expression *PLAIN SAILING* is used predominantly when things are anything but plain sailing (i.e., anything but straightforward). Compare also the expression *FIT STATE*: of the 44 occurrences in the BNC, only four or five appear to refer to an actually achieved state of fitness.

All this may seem surprising inasmuch as the potential prosodic meaning in these cases might be to all intents and purposes the opposite of the basic meaning of the core item, but it fits seamlessly within the framework of construing semantic prosody as characterising both word and co-text. Note that if in these cases we were to privilege the first type of description outlined in 4.2, whereby prosodies are described with reference to the meanings of the co-text but without any conspicuous reference to the basic meaning of the node itself, then these moves would be impossible: *PROPER* and *CREDIBILITY* might be assigned a prosody of 'irritating absence', but not 'properness/credibility being irritatingly absent', and *BUDGE* would be assigned a prosody of what might loosely be called 'frustrating refusal', but not one of 'frustratingly refusing to budge'.

4.3.2   *HARNESS* and Company

Let us now examine some words which have not been analysed in studies on semantic prosody but which are also of interest in the context of describing semantic prosody in terms of the meaning of both node and co-text.

The verb *HARNESS* is defined in the *Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary* (2009:724) as follows:

> If you harness something such as an emotion or natural source of energy, you bring it under your control and use it. *Turkey plans to*

> *harness the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers for big hydro-electric power projects.*

A BNC concordance to *HARNESS* as a verb produces 449 occurrences. A selection of these is reproduced in Table 4.2 (in lines 15, 21 and 22 the noun has been wrongly tagged as a verb).

Table 4.2 constitutes only one sample, but the analysis of several samples suggests that somewhere in the region of 70% of the occurrences of *HARNESS* are present in longer sequences indicating or appearing to indicate that the harnessing has yet to be done, or that it may or may not have been done. There is a correspondingly smaller percentage of cases where the

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Table 4.2 BNC Concordance to 'harness/ harnesses/ harnessing/ harnessed' as Verb (Random Selection of 30/449)

1. of renewable energy must be	*harnessed*	in future, our long-standing service
2. for Orc warriors. They can also be	*harnessed*	to pull chariots. Thanks to these
3. In the former, nuclear power can be	*harnessed*	by splitting the nuclei of atoms that
4. the multinationals' power has been	*harnessed*	have substantial gains in income-
5. of our number, Master Dratslinger,	*harnesses*	ghosts by means of vibration. We
6. away. It was like trying to push a fully	*harnessed*	plough horse. Isabel abandoned
7. a loft conversion, say. Solar water heating	*Harnessing*	the natural radiant energy of
8. no doubt continue to be inventive in	*harnessing*	the insights of teachers and the
9. the technique being performed. A kiai	*harnesses*	the body's energy and allows it to
10. dependent upon senior management	*harnessing*	the social forces of organization
11. The snag is—first you must	*harness*	the fish. However, using a method
12. provide an effective way of	*harnessing*	sentencing policy to the broader
13. recognized the vital importance of	*harnessing*	employee commitment to company
14. was recruited and given the task of	*harnessing*	the club's talent. Steve Lewis, who
15. with sunscreens. Replace any belt or	*harness*	after an accident. GET A SET OF
16. dismissed as a kitchen maid, she	*harnesses*	her poetry to her teapot. She is an
17. practice. He says that we should	*harness*	the expertise of the various agencies
18. Walter Lang as its chairman, so	*harnessing*	Long's vindictive powers and
19. teachers be met and their strengths	*harnessed*	within the broader concerns
20. control and industrial inspection. The system	*harnesses*	the power of up to 48
21. it is being executed. 'You need a test	*harness*	for testing stuff dynamically. That's
22. assessments it is possible to write test	*harnesses*	that check whether the program
23. more philosophical might say that	*harnessing*	the power of the elements brings
24. thinks he ought to be able to	*harness*	the lighting,' said the picture-imp
25. facing personnel management: the need to	*harness*	the ability of the computer was
26. be that management should seek to	*harness*	the informal organisation to operate
27. hydro-electric scheme has been developed to	*harness*	this great natural resource.
28. can use his riding art and physique to	*harness*	and master each new step in GP
29. one director was doing his best to	*harness*	the new realism to a more rewarding
30. of time and whose power, when	*harnessed*,	as now by the poet, renders all

Table 4.3   BNC Concordance to 'shoehorn' (All 7 Occurrences)

1. day? Heaven forbid, but the urge to	*shoehorn*	into the calendar as much of it as
2. criminals. The danger with trying to	*shoehorn*	the IRA into this cat- egory is that
3. the high cost was because we had to	*shoehorn*	the suite into a difficult- shaped
4. critics' cavils concerned the attempt to	*shoehorn*	a plot around Myers' modest
5. Prendergrass, Kaye managed to	*shoehorn*	the material into two CDs, utilising
6. be seen, of course, as an attempt to	*shoehorn*	information technology into old
7. our own, different talents to work, not	*shoehorn*	ourselves into men's positions.

harnessing has incontestably been carried out. This ratio is supported by the *Cobuild* example quoted previously.

Unsurprisingly, further investigations reveal that the non-factual use is particularly associated with the base form *HARNESS* which, like the base forms of verbs in general, lends itself in particular to representing states of affairs which have not taken place (see also Hunston 2002:61), inasmuch as base forms contribute massively to tense forms in the future (*they'll harness*, *are they going to harness?*), the conditional (*they would(n't) harness*), as well as to negative and interrogative structures in the present and past tenses (*do they harness?*, *they didn't harness*). In passing it may be noted that this appears to be a general truth about base forms, and may be briefly illustrated (Table 4.3) with the concordance to the far less frequent verb *SHOEHORN* (but see also 5.3.1 on the base form of *UNDERGO*), whose base form in the BNC tends to be associated with *attempts* to shoehorn or the *need* to shoehorn (exceptions are lines 3 and 5). The form *SHOEHORNED*, on the other hand, occurs four times and has a more factual quality (Table 4.4).

For the purposes of comparison the reader may also wish to check the expression *BREAK THE DEADLOCK*, initially using all forms of *BREAK*. Of the 70 occurrences in the BNC, by my calculations 37 of them are used non-factually and 31 factually, with two cases where the situation is less clear. Yet when we analyse the base form alone, the percentage of non-factual occurrences is much higher (30 non-factual against 8 factual),

Table 4.4   BNC Concordance to 'shoehorned'

1. elusive enemy of freedom, originally	*shoehorned*	into power to guard American
2. onto the prestigious site, the facility is	*shoehorned*	into a very narrow tract, and the
3. as a mock Tudor shopping arcade, are	*shoehorned*	into a tight complex of
4. rather than the expected two. We	*shoehorned*	in the jeep, and the rest of our

and it may well be that the choice of the base form is driven primarily by the (non-factual) prosody. Typical usage includes *in an attempt to break the deadlock, in an effort to break the deadlock*, *failed to break the deadlock*. An analogous case is *SHRINK FROM*, whose percentage of non-factual occurrences as base form in the BNC is vastly more frequent than the percentages for *SHRINKING FROM, SHRINKS FROM, SHRANK FROM* and *SHRUNK FROM*.

In consideration of the above, and in accordance with the approach whereby prosodies are described in terms which include both node and co-text, we might therefore be justified in attributing to the unit of meaning containing *HARNESS* in all its forms—but in particular as base form—a description such as 'desiring or needing to harness', or more simply of 'not (yet) harnessing/being harnessed'. Equally we might wish to propose for the unit of meaning containing the base form *SHOEHORN* a formula such as 'not (yet) shoehorning/being shoehorned'. And we may be justified in attributing to the units of meaning containing *FIT STATE* and *BREAK* (as base form) *THE DEADLOCK* descriptions such as 'not being in a fit state' or 'not (yet) breaking a deadlock'.

4.3.3   The Case of *MORE FLEXIBLE*

If one supports the view that semantic prosody is to be described in terms which embrace both node and co-text, but if at the same time one is prepared to accept a number of points raised in Chapter 2, i.e., (i) that not all the instances of semantic prosody described in the literature could be said to have attitudinal function, (ii) that all units of meaning are potential candidates for semantic prosody, and (iii) that semantic prosody is not necessarily hidden, then there is a risk of circularity, or at least of reaching conclusions through corpus analysis which were highly predictable from the outset.

Note that the prosodies suggested in the previous section were not particularly predictable. The claim that (the base form of) *BREAK THE DEADLOCK* generally appears in units of meaning with a prosody corresponding to something like 'not (yet) breaking a deadlock' is not a statement of the obvious, precisely because positing the element of non-factuality requires either some earnest introspection or corpus investigations (though it is argued in Chapter 7 that corpus investigations cannot be divorced from introspection). Having said that, there are cases where the prosody *is* totally predictable.

As a first step let us take a look at the lexical profile of *FLEXIBLE* reproduced by Tognini-Bonelli (2001:23). The author's concordance data reveal that in many cases the lexical environment includes expressions such as *keeping future options as flexible as possible*; *how flexible are you prepared to be*; *are simplified and made more flexible*; *would enable us to be more flexible*; *urged the UNITA rebels to be more flexible*; *private heads urged to be "flexible" on pupil drug use*; *committee has stressed the need for flexible planning*

decisions; *Rowell's plan to develop a flexible style suited to all conditions.* Overall the author concludes that several expressions in the lexical profile of *FLEXIBLE* "give a very positive evaluation of flexibility", but one could go further and posit that her data would also suggest that *FLEXIBLE* tends to occur in units of meaning characterised by a prosody of 'needing or desiring flexibility', which in its turn would imply a state of insufficient flexibility. Having said that, there are other occurrences in the concordance reproduced by Tognini-Bonelli where this element of need or desire is not particularly manifest, and searches for *FLEXIBLE* in the BNC indicate that although the 'need / desire' element is certainly a recurring feature, it is perhaps not salient enough to warrant the positing of a prosody.

However, if we take the expression *MORE FLEXIBLE* as our node, we find that in its co-text the 'needing / desiring' element is much more pervasive (Table 4.5). Notice co-text such as *was needed*, *with a view to developing*, *there may be*, *if our society began to move towards*, *I think these could be*, *is designed to make*, *he wanted to create*, *should be*, *to make available*, *it may be*, *are becoming.* In combination with the node, many of these indicate a need, desire or plan for greater flexibility, and there is in any case the suggestion that the flexibility is not quite in place, that it may not yet be a reality. In other words, there is a non-factual element which, although it does not by any means characterise all the co-texts of *MORE FLEXIBLE* in the BNC, does however characterise a substantial percentage of them. The concordances to *MORE FLEXIBILITY* and *GREATER FLEXIBILITY* have similar patterns.

If this interpretation of the BNC data is tenable, then the following could be inferred: '*MORE FLEXIBLE* is associated with a unit of meaning which describes a need, plan or wish for greater flexibility'. Or, more generally, '*MORE FLEXIBLE* is associated with a unit of meaning which describes states of affairs where desired greater flexibility is not yet in place'. However, this would not cover a notable slice of 'factual' occurrences in the concordance, i.e., cases where greater flexibility *was* required but is now in place, for example:

- Malaysia has subsequently become *more flexible* in the application of its

- lusty singing. In its place there are *more flexible* forms of worship and much

- doomed to failure. 'Science' became rather *more flexible* around 1870, when

Therefore the formulation could be extended to accommodate the factual element too:

> '*MORE FLEXIBLE* is associated with a unit of meaning which describes states of affairs where greater flexibility is not yet in place, or more rarely, is in place'.

Table 4.5   BNC Concordance to 'more flexible' (Random 30/425)

1. with classical dance because it is *more flexible* and expressive and many
2. areas, was rapidly eroding. A much *more flexible* and pro-active strategy was
3. phased out with a view to developing *more flexible* training arrangements for a
4. For the dominant, there may be a *more flexible* perimeter, depending upon the
5. a method of selection that is both *more flexible* and more discriminating than
6. This trend for library guides to be *more flexible*, to be better designed
7. began to move towards *more flexible* cycles, in which different communities
8. available. I think these could be *more flexible*. Using the ME-6 through a
9. of years have forced a much *more flexible* approach to budgeting, management
10. or auxiliary activities, which is *more flexible*, at least in principle, and the
11. best liner to work with because it's *more flexible*, and you can expect many
12. as the query and reporting tool, a *more flexible* version of the Cognos software
13. Undoubtedly, the labour market is *more flexible*. Non-standard types of work
14. of lymphocyte recruitment *more flexible* and selective. We and others have
15. designed to make software licensing *more flexible* for the user and easier for the
16. change in the self were to generate a *more flexible* response to morality, and one
17. has subsequently become *more flexible* in the application of its procedures
18. of the new coop, his markets are *more flexible* and are more than likely to
19. in the new play he wanted to create a *more flexible* and less ostensible verse line
20. print or broadcasting, should be *more flexible*, to attract and encourage suitable
21. access to training are becoming *more flexible*, on paper if not always in
22. singing. In its place there are *more flexible* forms of worship and much smaller
23. chronic cases, and to make available a *more flexible* range of community services
24. To be honest. Okay. It's certainly *more flexible*, because you can then We've
25. be, thirdly, that the gains from *more flexible* forms of employment contracts
26. that the position is now becoming *more flexible* —has ignored.
27. Advanced Courses structure which is *more flexible* and responsive and which
28. last year or two have become *more flexible*. To build up a more stable relationship
29. to failure. 'Science' became rather *more flexible* around 1870, when organised
30. (see Chapter 11) is a faster and *more flexible* process where internal

This solution, however, remains unsatisfactory because it does not stress sufficiently that the situations of achieved flexibility are clearly bound up with a previous condition of relative or total inflexibility. Notice the co-text in the three lines: *Malaysia has subsequently become*; *'Science' became*; *in its place*, each of which suggests a transition from a situation of lesser flexibility to a situation of greater flexibility. Consequently it could be hypothesised that if *MORE FLEXIBLE*—and indeed *MORE FLEXIBILITY* and *GREATER FLEXIBILITY*—connect with a condition of less flexibility or inflexibility, whether past or present, then we can infer that the unit of meaning containing *MORE FLEXIBLE* might be accounted for as follows:

'*MORE FLEXIBLE* is associated with a transition, whether simply desired or actually achieved, and whether past or present, from a situation of less flexibility to a situation of greater flexibility'.

At this point the whole thing becomes ludicrous, because the rather complicated prosody which might attend upon this description is suggested by the meaning of the core item anyway. Yet in spite of the absurdity, if the meaning of the core item is allowed to contribute to the meaning of the prosody, there may be no theoretical reason not to uphold the formulation supplied. As pointed out in 2.2.3 in connection with *SNOB-BISH*, it may be misguided to bar words or units of meaning entry to the semantic prosody club simply because their prosody does not appear to disclose anything new or unexpected.

The drawback is that if we do grant, however circular it may appear, that *MORE FLEXIBLE* could be associated with a prosody of 'desired and/or achieved transition from less flexible to more flexible states' or something along those lines, and if we do argue that semantic prosody is to be described across the board in terms which include both node and co-text, then the floodgates open.

4.3.4   THE CASE OF *FROM BAD TO WORSE*

Examples of core items such as *MORE FLEXIBLE* associated with predictable or at least unrevealing prosodies may be just the tip of the iceberg, but the reader may feel dissatisfied with my analyses of *MORE FLEXIBLE* and other core items, because although I have argued that not all the prosodies identified in the literature could really be said to express attitude, the fact remains that the unit of meaning I have suggested for *MORE FLEXIBLE* does not correspond with Sinclair's model, primarily because the attendant prosody—something like 'desired and/or achieved transition from less flexible to more flexible states'—is not clearly or necessarily informed by the attitudinal function which is so crucial to Sinclair's descriptions. With this in mind, let us turn to a further expression—*FROM BAD TO WORSE*—this time trying to adhere more closely to Sinclair's model of the unit of meaning, i.e., in terms of collocation, colligation, semantic preference and semantic prosody. The sequence *FROM BAD TO WORSE*, which will constitute our core item, occurs 41 times in the BNC (Table 4.6).

With reference to this concordance, I provide a detailed examination of it adopting four constituents of Sinclair's model:

- collocation: there is a strong collocation with all forms of the verb *go*, which precedes the core item and is almost always present, and with *things* (as the grammatical subject of *go*) which occurs in around 50% of the lines. Other subjects of the verb preceding the core item are *matters* (3), and *situation* (2).
- colligation: there is clear preference for verb forms referring to past time. These generally precede the core item (*went* (18), *tumbled* (1),

Table 4.6   BNC Concordance to 'from bad to worse' (All 41 Occurrences, Alphabetical Sorting at L1, L2)

1. She spoke in subtitles. Not on.	*From bad to worse*.	The ambulance whinged all the way
2. it happens under Chapter 11.	*From bad to worse*	Judge Lifland's decision may have been.
3. and the evening went generally	*from bad to worse*,	with Sebastien the only one with any
4. because it was just getting	*from bad to worse*.	What happened to your word processor?
5. suggests that things could go	*from bad to worse*,'	Miss Baxter said. Parents who abuse
6. crisis in nursing could go	*from bad to worse*	as industry, the United States and
7. into the boy, or watch him go	*from bad to worse*'.	David's answer had been to bring
8. otherwise Ay! It's just gonna go	*from bad to worse*	isn't Yeah, it? She's been better this
9. not get better and better, they go	*from bad to worse*.	The onward march of racism is traced
10. When Cecilia appeared to go	*from bad to worse*,	Brian had advertised for a housekeeper
11. Thus the situation goes	*from bad to worse*.	In this way a crack is really a mechanism
12. think that things are going	*from bad to worse*.	This is not going to disappear overnight,
13. BARNES. Things are going	*from bad to worse*.	Defeats for Swindon and Hereford.
14. of the Day BBC really are going	*from bad to worse*.	They fall over themselves to show.
15. floor flat and things are going	*from bad to worse*.	They just keep taking money away
16. Ham? That they are going	*from bad to worse*.	Successive home defeats, this one by
17. that things were really going	*from bad to worse*,	were deteriorating. And it concerned him
18. ith him. Things were going	*from bad to worse*.	He wasn't just attractive, damn him, he
19. feel that things have gone	*from bad to worse*,	that you get a shake-up and change in
20. lost it thinks they have gone	*from bad to worse*.	On the other hand, though, we do in
21. But while the British have gone	*from bad to worse*,	the Games have become a Chinese
22. to his Super—' . . . matters have gone	*from bad to worse*	. . . Today, service, seniority and
23. would agree it was a movement	*from bad to worse*.	What you say is very plausible,
24. when Wales stumbled, they tumbled	*from bad to worse*.	There was the simple failure to
25. sorted out. Things, though, went	*from bad to worse*,	and the following January I tried to
26. defied his own name and went	*from bad to worse*,	the former United star had pellets
27. piously. The conversation went	*from bad to worse*.	Nigel told Eleanor that he despised
28. that point on the debate went	*from bad to worse*.	We were lambasted by a bellicose
29. over Things for Gloucestershire went	*from bad to worse*.	Hodgson went in the 5th over for
30. well and all credit to him. I went	*from bad to worse*.	Nothing was right with my game at
31. on the place. But things just went	*from bad to worse*.	Ferguson refers to a club and pub
32. local competition, matters went	*from bad to worse*.	William Denny recommended that
33. by an understudy. Matters went	*from bad to worse*.	Drew left the company and joined
34. for much longer. The mines went	*from bad to worse*	and during 1579 Höchstetter
35. casualties. As the situation went	*from bad to worse*,	the people living near the volcano
36. turned to horror . . . and then went	*from bad to worse*.	FIRST thieves stripped their room
37. to sidefoot a second. Things went	*from bad to worse*	in the second half. Smith and Steve
38. back into the lead . . . things went	*from bad to worse*	then as United defender Colin
39. which Event became. Things went	*from bad to worse*.	Branson was not able to inspire the
40. this mate of his and his wife—things went	*from bad to worse*,	seems he met this woman
41. was tremendous. As war went	*from bad to worse*	in Europe, many well-known

have gone (4), *were going* (2), *was getting*). The present progressive is also reasonably common, while future forms and the present simple are rare. It will also be noticed that around 80% of the time the core item *FROM BAD TO WORSE* is immediately followed by a full stop (23 times) or a comma (10).

- semantic preference: the idea of movement is overwhelming, and is usually expressed verbally (forms of *go*, *tumbled*), but *trip* and *movement* itself are also present. In most cases it is things, rather than people, that move from bad to worse, and these 'things' generally refer to situations or circumstances. One notices also the presence of unfavourable-sounding states of affairs, for example: *war*, *crisis*, *distressed*, *failed bid*, *disaster*, *horror*, *psychologically impaired*, *commit suicide*, *got sent off*, *deteriorating*, *depression*, *great depression*, *tensions*, *anxieties*.
- semantic prosody: the concept of movement suggests a change of state, a transfer from one situation to another. In the specific case, this change of state is from an undesirable circumstance to one which is even more undesirable. A melancholy attitude of unresolvability and hopelessness is suggested (a) by the lexical environment (*anxieties*, *great depression*, *disaster*, *suicide*), (b) by the grammar of the co-text (the situation belongs to a past time) and (c) by the punctuation of the co-text (the depressing finality implied by the unusual frequency of the full-stops which close off the unit if meaning as if to foreclose a solution).

At this point I am no longer sure whether I wish the reader to take this prosody seriously or not. On the one hand it is highly interpretative and deliberately controversial, while on the other it comes across as redundant or even risible, because the idea of a depressing change of state from an undesirable circumstance to one which is even more undesirable is spelt out by the meaning of the core item anyway.

In a recent oral exam in Linguistics, during which the allegedly covert nature of semantic prosody was being discussed, I rather unkindly asked a student if she could predict a semantic prosody that might be associated with the verb *KILL*. After reflecting carefully upon this zany question, she replied that *KILL* was not associated with a prosody, "because the negativity is all in the verb". As a non-attending student, she had been required to read up on semantic prosody, and it could be that her answer was a reasonable reaction to how it had been presented and discussed in the reading list I had compiled. At this point I changed tack somewhat by asking her simply to predict the typical co-text of *KILL*, and although she made a valiant attempt, she was unable to see the relevance of the question to semantic prosody.

Perhaps I should heed more closely the signals my students send me, but I shall pursue the point nonetheless. Predictably enough, in the BNC concordance to *KILL* (or better in a selection—there are almost 15,000 hits), there does not appear to be any specific semantic preference as such, but the concordance is predominantly characterised by people or things that kill, will kill, have killed, want to kill etc., and/or by people or things that are killed, will be killed, have been killed, were nearly killed etc. Is this interpretable in prosodic terms? Is it legitimate to describe the unit of meaning

containing *KILL* as approximating to 'a sad situation whereby people or things kill or are killed'?

So in a sense my student's demurral was perfectly justified. Perhaps the negativity really is "all in the verb". And perhaps the prosodic potential of *MORE FLEXIBLE* and *FROM BAD TO WORSE* is almost all in the core item, however much support it may receive from the co-text.

I am aware that some of the prosodies identified in this chapter may come across as out of kilter with most of the prosodies discussed in corpus linguistics so far. Certainly (i) not all of them possess obvious evaluative features or indeed any pragmatic function at all, but then, as argued in 2.1, the prosodies which have been ascribed to, for example, *SET IN*, *CAUSE*, *COMMIT* and *NAKED EYE* are not overtly evaluative or pragmatic in nature either (though the boundaries of pragmatics are slippery), and (ii) they are not all hidden, though as suggested in 2.2ff, it is far from clear that the hidden element is a defining feature of semantic prosody (see also Chapter 7), and of course it has been argued that all lexical items have prosodic potential.

Nevertheless one cannot help feeling that positing prosodies such as those suggested for *FROM BAD TO WORSE* would rather make a mockery of the whole notion of semantic prosody. As we have seen, studies on the subject have thrown up some fascinating facts and ideas, from Sinclair's lexical profile of *SET IN*, to Louw's (1993) observations regarding *DAYS ARE* (see 5.3.3), to both Tognini-Bonelli's and Stubbs' revelations about the prosody of *PROPER*, to Sinclair's insights concerning *BROOK*, *BUDGE* etc. Can all these seriously be coupled with the hypothesis that the prosodic force of *MORE FLEXIBLE* connects with a transition from a situation of less flexibility to a situation of more flexibility? Can they be coupled with the hypothesis that *FROM BAD TO WORSE* is associated with a prosody such as 'a state of melancholy following a change of state from an undesirable circumstance to one which is even more undesirable'? It would, to say the least, be anticlimactic.

4.4   SEMANTIC PROSODY AS A FEATURE OF THE WORD ALONE

It is worth emphasising that the risk of circularity or of stating the obvious described in the previous section is fairly negligible if semantic prosody is considered to belong to or to be a feature of the node alone, albeit inferred from the meaning of the co-text. If *BREAK THE DEADLOCK*, for instance, were analysed in terms of this approach, then its prosodic meaning might include 'frustrated attempt/effort' or 'failure', and *MORE FLEXI-BLE* might be described in terms of 'change of state', but since the meaning of the node would not be part of the meaning of the prosody, the danger of describing a full and unrevealing circle would be less immediate.

Having said that, if the prosody is not informed by the meaning of the node, then there are perils of a different nature, which will be outlined in the sections which follow.

4.4.1   *ALLEVIATE* and Company

It was mentioned in 2.2.3 that an important discovery in the area of semantic prosody would be if one were to find words with a transparently positive basic meaning but a negative prosody, or vice versa, words with a transparently negative basic meaning but a positive prosody. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, some of the words and expressions analysed in the literature, for instance *CREDIBILITY*, *PLAIN SAILING*, *PROPER*, might already lay claim to this up to a point, but there are other words which appear to fit the bill perfectly.

It is beyond dispute that verbs such as *ALLEVIATE*, *HEAL*, *EASE*, *SOLVE*, *RESOLVE*, *RELIEVE* and *CURE* would be considered to have a favourable basic meaning, but they habitually co-occur with words which indicate conventionally undesirable things or states of affairs.[1] Consider the concordance to *ALLEVIATE* in Table 4.7.

Here we find a word of incontrovertibly good denotational meaning with a lexical profile which might be considered to contain even more consistently undesirable elements than that of *SET IN*. Within the framework of a description whereby semantic prosody is inferred from a node's co-text alone, this is in a sense an extraordinary discovery. A negative prosody could be assigned to *ALLEVIATE*, just as a negative prosody was assigned to *SET IN*, in view of the fact that its co-text is peppered with seriously undesirable elements. In one fell swoop a compelling distinction could at last be made between the overlapping notions of semantic prosody and connotation: *ALLEVIATE*, *RELIEVE* etc. could be associated with a negative prosody, whereas we could not by any stretch of the imagination argue that they have negative connotations. The semantic prosody of these words, though a feature of the node, is strongly contingent upon their co-text, while their favourable *connotations* cannot be considered to have a similarly close relationship with that co-text. On account of its total contingency upon a word's co-text, semantic prosody might finally emerge as a unique semantic phenomenon.

The downside of this solution is that there is something overtly counter-intuitive about it. Although the term semantic prosody was coined only recently, and is therefore relatively free of the shackles of a tradition which might hamper its theoretical development, it nonetheless seems instinctively unsatisfactory to assign any negativity whatsoever to a group of words which are so unchallengeably positive in meaning. Of course it could be done, but it is no easy task because, in my view, there is among other things a certain reluctance to prise semantic prosody and connotation apart. As Munday (forthcoming) underlines, semantic prosody, "while

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Table 4.7 BNC Concordance to 'alleviate/alleviates/alleviating/alleviated'
(Random 30/547. Alphabetical Sorting at R1,R2)

1. into a program which could	*alleviate*	a lot. Yes I know, I know of the work,
2. Mary and Rose. And rather than	*alleviating*	any muddle we might get into they
3. and animal crops that could help	*alleviate*	food scarcity problems in developing
4. while at home, she made no efforts to	*alleviate*	her lot. She sought no friends; she
5. all. This problem of balance can be	*alleviated*	if students are left to make their own
6. the past 13 years, and which can be	*alleviated*	only by the immediate election of
7. from becoming actual ones; to	*alleviate*	or solve the actual problems; or to
8. horrors, then don't. My role in life is to	*alleviate*	pain, not cause it. 'I want to tell
9. give items like this, you not only help	*alleviate*	poverty and hunger overseas, but
10. of Scottish scones and cookies can	*alleviate*	some of the effects of lead. So also
11. the Creator's power but also	*alleviate*	suffering. To study the book of nature
12. beginning of the following chapter. It	*alleviates*	the burden of costs by providing
13. an adequate flow of resources' to	*alleviate*	the debt burdens of the most needy
14. very uncomfortable experiences; to	*alleviate*	the discomfort they induce some
15. in the River Forth. In order to	*alleviate*	the fears and objections associated
16. and regional infrastructures to	*alleviate*	the financial expense and cost in
17. much can be done to overcome or	*alleviate*	the handicap. The concerns of older
18. there was nothing that they could do to	*alleviate*	the hardship of Legion life, so it
19. Nursing Home end, which should	*alleviate*	the parking problem. The new Alarm
20. The 1982 PSOE government tried to	*alleviate*	the problem of knowledge by
21. and that the drugs will be able to	*alleviate*	the symptoms of this memory loss
22. was infectious. Her new partner	*alleviated*	the terrible loneliness caused by
23. currency earnings. The project will	*alleviate*	the USSR's internal energy problem,
24. They invited friends to stay, to	*alleviate*	their couple-loneliness. Liz came,
25. or so she hoped: she had tried to	*alleviate*	their suspicions by explaining that
26. parents who keep rushing in, trying to	*alleviate*	their teenager's suffering, can
27. Amnesty International seeks to	*alleviate*,	there are many other innocent people
28. eastern guises, had been designed to	*alleviate*	this dependence, to keep Canadian
29. aged 62 and 63. It is intended to	*'alleviate*	unemployment among younger
30. which gives guidance on how to	*alleviate*	your problems. For most of us,

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being strongly collocational, may be said to blend collocation and connotation". As a result it might be condemned as unacceptable to ascribe an unfavourable prosody to *ALLEVIATE* and company, precisely because it seems problematic to ascribe to them an unfavourable connotation.

A further hitch is that since *ALLEVIATE*, *RELIEVE* and the rest seem impervious to the pernicious influences of their habitual co-occurrences, i.e., they remain good despite their undesirable company, any theories about meanings being attached or transferred are considerably debilitated. The point is that we would need to establish why *HAPPEN, BREAK OUT* etc. have proved vulnerable to the evil influence of their bad co-occurrences and have thus acquired a bad 'aura', while *ALLEVIATE* and *RELIEVE* are to all intents and purposes incorruptible. Some might counter that

the strongly positive meaning of the latter prevents them being 'contaminated', but this does not change the fact that with *ALLEVIATE* and company the notions of colouring, rubbing off, infecting, etc. run up against a brick wall.

Moreover, the assignment of a prosody of unpleasantness to *ALLEVIATE* and company would be once again (like *SNOBBISH* in 2.2.2 and *MORE FLEXIBLE* in 4.3.3) in conflict with all the propensities of current studies on semantic prosody, so concerned as they are with subliminality, with what goes on beneath the surface of text, with how covert meaning is conveyed, and above all with how people transmit bad 'vibes' through language without apparently saying anything bad. Any suggestion that *ALLEVIATE* has a subliminal prosody of, for example, 'sadness resulting from suffering' would no doubt be considered inane.

Note that if we return to the interpretation whereby prosodies characterise a longer sequence rather than the word alone, then the outcome is quite different. The unit of meaning associated with *ALLEVIATE* might be described as 'reducing or trying to reduce physical or psychological problems', which of course repeats the risk of circularity characterising cases such as *MORE FLEXIBLE* and *FROM BAD TO WORSE*, but avoids the theoretical difficulties of the prosody belonging to *ALLEVIATE* alone.

4.5   HABITUAL LEXICAL ENVIRONMENT: SEMANTIC PROSODY AND CONNOTATION

I would like to complete the current chapter by returning momentarily to a comparison first drawn in Chapter 2, that between semantic prosody and connotation. So far in this chapter I have tried to demonstrate that the link between semantic prosody and lexical environment is a problematic one in view of the differing approaches to semantic prosody adopted in the literature. It is perhaps worth underlining, however, that even if it could be proved that semantic prosody were inescapably dependent upon habitual lexical environment, in reality such a link would not necessarily be exclusive to semantic prosody. It would be hazardous to suggest, for example, that *connotation* and lexical environment are completely disassociated. McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006:85) move towards this position when they state: "In our view, connotation can be collocational or non-collocational whereas semantic prosody can only be collocational".

Louw (2000:50), on the other hand, as noted in 2.1.2, regards connotation as schematic rather than collocational ("knowledge of connotations is often a form of schematic knowledge of repeatable events, e.g. what urchins do, where they live, their financial means or lack of it and how they behave, etc"), whereas, he claims, the force behind semantic prosody is collocational rather than schematic. He continues:

> the reversal of schematic knowledge is insufficient to identify a seman-
> tic prosody. For example, all weddings are meant to be happy and all
> funerals sad. Hence, when Philip Larkin describes *The Whitsun Wed-*
> *dings* as being ' . . . like a happy funeral . . . ', he is reversing a connota-
> tive pattern and not a semantic prosody.

In other words, the term *funeral* does not have happy connotations,
and as a result the expression *happy funeral* is unexpected and strik-
ing. Yet for this argument to be complete we must also recognise that
happy does not have funereal connotations, or more generally that *happy*
has happy connotations, however redundant or contradictory this might
seem (because as noted in 2.1.4, connotations are usually intended as
describing 'second-order' or peripheral meaning rather than primary
meaning).

This is all very well, but what also needs to be recognised is that the
sequence *happy funeral* is extremely rare. In the BNC the term *FUNERAL*
(singular) does not have especially unpleasant co-occurrences—there are
perhaps sombre elements such as *undertakers*, *coronary*, *coroner*, *coffin*,
as well as isolated occurrences such as *bomb*, *agony*, *dirge*, *riot police*,
but most of the co-occurrences seem fairly neutral, i.e., neither pleasant
nor unpleasant (*limousine*, *arrange*, *was over*, *attended*, *director(s)*, *pro-*
cession). Be that as it may, one thing is certain: the habitual co-text of
FUNERAL could not by any means be described as pleasant or cheerful,
with the possible exception of (*funeral*) *games*.

With this in mind, the unusuality of *happy funeral* could be con-
sidered just as much a co-occurrence phenomenon as a connotational
phenomenon. *FUNERAL* does not have a happy lexical environment,
and in fact *HAPPY* does not have a sombre or funereal lexical envi-
ronment—the more pleasant-sounding co-occurrences of *HAPPY* in
the BNC, e.g., *blessed*, *approbation*, *love and peace*, *joyous*, *triumph*
of togetherness, *laugh*, *warm feelings*, would seem to outweigh the less
pleasant ones (*bored*, *problems*, *depressed*, *no laughing matter*). There-
fore, when the two words join company, one could argue in favour of
a prosodic clash. Indeed, seen in this light it might be legitimate to
place *happy funeral* in the same bracket as other unusual combinations
such as *utterly good*, *our marriage set in* or *peace has broken out*, all
of which have been introduced in this book as examples of prosodic
clashes.

Whether this move is defensible or not, it once again seems hard to tear
semantic prosody and connotation asunder. Even if we were to accept the
view that semantic prosody is always inferred from habitual lexical envi-
ronment, it would nonetheless remain difficult to pursue the idea that
this dependency is *unique* to semantic prosody. Connotation, it would
appear, is also tied up with habitual lexical environment. The neutral-
sober environment of *FUNERAL* must connect in some way with the

sombre connotations of *FUNERAL*, while the more upbeat environment of *HAPPY* must connect with its cheerful connotations.

On the subject of funerals, consider as a further example the flower chrysanthemum. During my first year of residence in Italy, towards the end of October, I decided to purchase some flowers for my wife, finally plumping for chrysanthemums. On the way home I stopped at our local bakers, and as I bought some bread I proudly waved the flowers at the baker, a gushing, robust, in many ways rather forbidding woman with whom I was (fortunately) on good terms. Foolishly, I told her that the flowers were for my wife and asked her if she thought they were nice, at which she muttered something unsavoury before disappearing to the ovens at the back of the shop. I was both puzzled and mildly distressed by this, but as usual things were clarified by my wife, who explained to her ingenuous husband that in Italy chrysanthemums are the flowers people typically take to the cemetery on the feast of All Souls, which happened to be imminent. To my immense relief she accepted the flowers anyway, perhaps because it was such a rare event.

It does not seem controversial to state that in Italy chrysanthemums are associated with, or have connotations of, graveyards and departed souls. It seems equally uncontroversial to state that in the country where I was brought up, England, chrysanthemums do not have such connotations. The question is as follows: are these connotations 'corroborated', so to speak, in a large corpus of English, and in a large corpus of Italian? In the BNC a search for *CHRYSANTHEMUM* (singular and plural) produces no trace of a reference to death, even with expanded context (paragraph mode). In an Italian corpus of ten years of *La Repubblica*, a major daily newspaper in Italy, a concordance to the singular form *CRISANTEMO* contains very few references to anything concerned with graveyards or death. The plural form *CRISANTEMI*, however, is quite different. Although the classic ten-word concordance window contains some references to death, when each occurrence is expanded to paragraph mode we find that around half the total number of occurrences contain words connected with death and cemeteries: *defunti* (the deceased), *morti* (the dead), *morte* (death), *tombe* (graves), *loculi* (burial niches), *cimitero* (cemetery), *rito funebre* (burial rite), *corteo funebre* (funeral procession), *bara* (coffin), *feretro* (coffin), *camera ardente* (funeral chamber), *reliquia* (relic), *tentato omicidio* (attempted murder). I shall spare the reader the more violent and depressing occurrences. And that is not counting several instances of the polysemous term *corona*, which in combination with chrysanthemums would mean 'wreath', but whose core meaning is 'crown'.[2]

According to this contrastive example, connotation, as well as semantic prosody, may be closely intertwined with habitual lexical environment. This does not mean that this is always the case; this does not mean that connotation is as dependent upon lexical environment as semantic prosody. But it might suggest that the two cannot systematically be torn asunder using the criterion of co-occurrence.

4.6   SUMMARY

In the current chapter it was initially hypothesised that the one characteristic attributed to semantic prosody which might effectively distinguish it from other analogous phenomena, particularly connotation, is its close dependence upon lexical environment. In order to test this hypothesis I examined the relationship between semantic prosody and lexical environment.

It was argued that in the literature semantic prosody is sometimes considered to be a feature of the word alone, and sometimes a feature of the word and its co-text. However, whichever of these approaches is prioritised, certain problems arise. If semantic prosody is taken to be a feature of the word, it becomes problematic to account for verbs such as *ALLEVIATE* and *EASE*, which have not been 'infected' by their consistently unpleasant co-occurrences. If, on the other hand, semantic prosody is taken to be a feature of the word + co-text, for example the unit of meaning containing *MORE FLEXIBLE* or *FROM BAD TO WORSE*, then there is a danger of circularity, or at least of reaching conclusions which were transparent from the outset. At this stage it is difficult to predict just how many lexical items there are like *ALLEVIATE* on the one hand and *FROM BAD TO WORSE* on the other, but one is entitled to suspect that they are not simply a recalcitrant minority.

Finally, it was noted that connotation, as well as semantic prosody, may connect powerfully with lexical environment.

5   Semantic Prosody and Corpus Data

For what a man would like to be true, that he more readily believes

5.0   INTRODUCTION

So far in this book I have focused on features of semantic prosody (i) which are shared by all descriptions of it (Chapter 2), and (ii) which are not shared by all descriptions, receiving differing degrees of emphasis from one account to the next (Chapters 3 and 4). In the next three chapters I shall consider semantic prosody in connection with the broader issues of the use, role and influence of corpus data. The current chapter considers the link between semantic prosody and corpus data as envisaged by scholars who have contributed to the subject. Chapter 6 also discusses this link, but with particular reference to data supplied by the concordance. Chapter 7 takes up the question of the role of intuition and introspection in corpus analyses.

It may seem surprising that, despite my broad division into attributes of semantic prosody which are (i) common and (ii) not common to contributions on the topic, I have reached Chapter 5 of this book without yet fully discussing a feature which would appear to achieve unanimity in all descriptions: the dependence of semantic prosody upon data retrieved from electronic corpora. I have delayed discussion of this until now because it seemed appropriate to deal with the relationship between semantic prosody and corpus data separately, once other issues had been addressed.

Semantic prosody is almost always presented as inextricably linked with corpus data. In the first part of this chapter I shall discuss the claim that semantic prosody is best revealed, or indeed only revealed, by corpus investigations. This will be followed by a brief survey of the main methods used to retrieve and assemble corpus data, and by some considerations concerning how we approach the data in terms of collocation and semantic consistency. It is then claimed that the conclusions we reach about semantic prosody are strongly influenced by our personal judgements about the world, in particular how we distinguish good from bad, and by the nature and length of the textual sequence we choose to analyse in order to identify the prosody. A central claim running through both this chapter and the next is that the way in which texts are arranged by corpus software may have significant bearing upon the way analysts interpret the data, to the

point that we may 'see' certain elements and relationships which in reality are absent.

5.1 A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP: SEMANTIC PROSODY AND CORPUS LINGUISTICS

The link between semantic prosody and corpus linguistics is incontestable. There are scarcely any studies on semantic prosody outside the domain of corpus linguistics. Semantic prosody, it would seem, is contingent upon concordancing and lexical profiles, apparently depending upon them for its recognition. Bublitz (1996:9) argues that the relationship, crucial to semantic prosody, between an item and its environment "is best, and, arguably, only revealed by applying computational methods to large corpora of discourse", while for Louw (1993:159), semantic prosody is "a phenomenon that has been only revealed computationally, and whose extent and development can only be properly traced by computational methods". In Louw (1997:247), the author states that semantic prosody "can only be perceived using computers and corpora". Adolphs and Carter (2002:7) echo these sentiments when they state that the study of semantic prosody "has only become possible with the advent of large corpora and suitable software", as does Hunston (2002:142), who asserts that "semantic prosody can be observed only by looking at a large number of instances of a word or phrase, because it relies on the typical use of a word or phrase". Tognini-Bonelli (2004:20) writes that thanks to the computer "the connotation pervading the vast majority of the uses of a word like *face* [as verb] has now become tangible and observable", and the glossary definition supplied by Baker et al. (2006:58) under 'discourse prosody' (see 1.1.5) reads: "A term . . . relating to the way that words in a corpus can collocate with a related set of words or phrases, often revealing (hidden) attitudes". Berber-Sardinha (2000:93) observes that "semantic prosody is the connotation conveyed by the regular co-occurrence of lexical items, as revealed by the exploration of a computer-readable corpus".

These are only a few of many analogous remarks in the literature, but even from this small selection some important points emerge.

Firstly, there is a clear desire to forge an unbreakable chain between semantic prosody and corpus data, to bestow an empirical dimension upon the whole issue, to make semantic prosody an observable phenomenon. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, the more traditional roles of intuition and introspection are played down, and the importance of tangible data is stressed. This is understandable, but I think caution is required, because, contrary to what is affirmed in the quotations cited earlier, semantic prosody cannot be "observed" or "revealed" as such. Concordances are observable, co-selection patterns are observable, but semantic prosody is not. Semantic prosody is, within corpus linguistics, the result of the analyst's

interpretation of corpus data, and although corpus data may well suggest the existence of prosodies, this does not mean that prosodies are an observable phenomenon. Xiao and McEnery (2006:124) state that "semantic prosody and semantic preference are as observable in Chinese as they are in English", and Partington (2004a:131–132) defines semantic prosody as similar to connotative meaning but "much less evident to the naked eye" (see also Partington 2004b:17), yet we should bear in mind that, since prosody is a type of meaning, we should not expect to 'see' it, either "with the naked eye" or with corpus assistance.

For similar reasons it is disorienting when Bublitz (1996:9) writes that "words can have a specific halo or profile, which may be positive, pleasant and good, or else negative, unpleasant and bad". The wording of this would imply that the "halo" and the "profile" are one and the same thing. As I understand it, the profile of a lexical item concerns the frequency and type of its co-occurrences, which are observable, while the "halo"—the prosody itself—which is the result of conclusions drawn by analysts about those co-occurrences, is not (though some authors do merge the concepts of prosody and profile in the same way as Bublitz). The situation is captured by Stubbs (2001b:449), who writes that discourse prosody "is not directly observable, but recurrent collocates often provide replicable evidence of evaluative connotations".

Just as unobservable as auras, halos and semantic prosody itself are the mental operations controlling analysts' interpretation of corpus data. This point will be taken up again in 5.3.

Secondly, the scholars quoted at the beginning of this section either give the impression or state unequivocally that semantic prosody can be observed or revealed by computational methods *alone*. I have already objected to the use of the term 'observed', and I believe 'revealed' is not entirely satisfactory either (the revelation is indirect, since once again, it is strictly speaking the item's *environment* which is 'revealed', and from this environment the analyst makes inferences about the presence or absence of a prosody), but what is worrying here is the exclusivity of such comments, i.e., that semantic prosody is concerned solely with "words in a corpus" (see Baker et al. 2006:58), and can be observed / revealed "only" by computational methods.

It certainly is a high-risk claim. To my knowledge no findings have been produced to demonstrate that semantic prosody cannot be inferred by non-computational methods, i.e., by elicitation or introspection, so it is puzzling that this eventuality should be so summarily dismissed. When discussing the typical (unpleasant) co-occurrences of *CAUSE*, Stubbs (1995:26) writes: "Some native speakers (but not all) that I have informally tested do produce one or two examples of such unpleasant collocations, but native speaker data are very sparse and unreliable indeed". Yet if the research methods are as informal as this, and the data so sparse, then it is difficult to imagine how the findings could be anything but unreliable. Among other things,

we do not know who these native speakers are, nor how Stubbs framed his questions, two factors which would bear hugely upon the results. Sinclair (1997:29) writes that "from the impromptu reactions of hundreds of fluent speakers, we can deduce that the intuitions about language which they can access are substantially at variance with their own language behaviour", but once again no data are produced to substantiate this, and no information is offered as to how the impromptu reactions in question were elicited, tested, analysed or collected, or even what these reactions were. This is important because it would seem that the testing of intuition can be carried out successfully if appropriate methodologies are adopted. Hoffmann (2006:167) remarks: "Informal methods of introspection data elicitation [*sic*] might fail to be reliable, but several studies have shown that judgements elicited via carefully constructed experiments are in fact intra- and inter-subject consistent".

Much has been made, in studies on semantic prosody and on corpus linguistics in general, of the supposed poverty of intuitions. Further, it is not uncommon to find references to retrievable and non-retrievable intuitions, though once again there is little indication of how one might go about retrieving those which are retrievable, or how one might verify the irretrievability of non-retrievable intuitions. See Chapter 7 for further discussion.

Of course there is no doubt that word environment is 'laid bare' or 'exposed' by corpus searches much more efficiently than by elicitation or introspection. As Widdowson (2000:6) notes: "Corpus analysis reveals textual facts, fascinating profiles of produced language, and its concordances are always springing surprises. They do indeed reveal a reality about language usage which was hitherto not evident to its users". There is also no doubt that the revealing of such realities can help us surmise the presence of a prosody, and no one would dispute that humans cannot retrieve co-selection patterns with the same degree of efficiency as a computer (see Stubbs 1995:24–25). Certainly the computer's capacity to highlight typical co-occurrences is immensely useful, perhaps above all to lexicographers (see Teubert 2004:91). However, to conclude from this self-evident difference between humans and machines that co-selection patterns, and therefore prosodies, cannot be identified by elicitation or introspection represents a hazardous leap. It is no coincidence that Widdowson refers to language usage which was *hitherto* not evident, i.e., the existence of certain language patterns (and therefore prosodies) may simply not have occurred to us before. This is very different from saying that they *could not be* inferred upon reflection. Tognini-Bonelli (2004:20) lists a number of co-occurrences of *FACE* as verb, concluding that they suggest that *FACE* is associated with an unfavourable prosody. She then states that "this type of information had not been available to the linguist until the advent of corpora. It is the sheer quantity of the evidence that makes this kind of insight possible". Here one would need to establish what "this type of information" actually refers to. If the reference is to the notion that

we as language users would be unable to identify co-occurrences of *FACE* in the manner that retrieval software does, then the claim that this type of information was not previously available is no doubt justified, but if the claim is that, before the advent of computers, introspection or elicitation were never able to pick up on the fact that *FACE* typically co-occurs with 'problematic' company such as *grim, dilemma, obstacles, problems, difficulties*, then the argument is considerably more difficult to uphold.

It will be noticed that the current section has close links with the sections on hidden meaning in Chapter 2. The argument that semantic prosody is revealed by computational methods alone loses a good deal of its strength if we take the view that prosodies are not necessarily hidden. I argued in Chapter 2 that a transparently negative item such as *SNOBBISH*, because of its unpleasant co-occurrences, is just as eligible for a prosody as a less transparently negative item such as *PAR FOR THE COURSE*, and I have argued that the negative prosody associated with *SNOBBISH* is anything but hidden. It follows that if we acknowledge that *SNOBBISH* is characterised by a negative semantic prosody which is not in any way covert, then we have to acknowledge that there is a fair chance that it will be arrived at by introspection or elicitation. At that point it becomes much harder to pursue the argument that prosodies cannot be identified by methods which are not exclusively computational. See again Chapter 7 on intuition and corpus data.

5.2   APPROACHING THE CORPUS DATA

There may be said to be two macro-stages in identifying a prosody by means of corpus investigation: (1) choosing a relevant and appropriate search, and (2) scanning the corpus data retrieved and then 'translating' these into a prosody. Stage 1 is clearly very important, since the data examined derive directly from the type of search the analyst decides to make in the first place. If the data produced by a given search do not result in anything relevant for the analyst, then s/he may conclude that no clear prosody can be identified for the item under analysis. However, it could be that there *is* something interesting in the data which the analyst has simply not noticed, or that shrewder searches would have provided greater insights. I shall not pursue this question now, since my intention in this chapter is to focus on how we relate to corpus data once the search has been made, but I shall return to it in Chapter 7. There are two main ways of accessing corpus data: via concordances or via what are known as collocational profiles or collocate frequency tables.

When scholars use collocational profiles within investigations of semantic prosody, they usually weed out elements in the profile that seem irrelevant to the investigation (these often include grammar words), and then supply a list of co-occurrences. This is a method often used by Stubbs (2001a),

who notes, for instance, that *POTENTIALLY* (p.107)—co-occurs with *dangerous*, *explosive*, *lethal*, *fatal*, *damaging*, *serious*, *disastrous*, *harmful*. Collocational profiles have the advantage of being able to draw useful information from often large amounts of text and convert it into convenient, readable, statistical lists (see Baker 2006:100ff). Collocational profiles come into their own, so to speak, when the habitual co-occurrences of an item are, to adapt Louw's term (2000:50), 'monolithic', i.e., when a conspicuous pattern characterises a high percentage of the concordance lines in question. For example Hoey (1997:5) found that in his 100-million word corpus there were 292 occurrences of the string *TRAIN AS A*, of which 262 were followed by "an occupation or related role", and this is a clear semantic preference. When the profile is less 'monolithic', the situation is less clear. For example, Tognini-Bonelli (2001:23) supplies the most frequent co-occurrences of *FLEXIBLE* (see also 4.3.3) in the Birmingham Corpus she uses, which are as follows. I have eliminated very high-frequency grammar words:

> *more* (1304 occurrences), *as* (387), *can* (226), *than* (183), *working* (169), *very* (166), *enough* (163), *labour* (148), *hours* (142), *response* (137), *system* (126), *approach* (125), *less* (114), *market* (103), *strategy* (60), *allow* (60), *markets* (56), *arrangements* (52).

The profile in question does not suggest a semantic preference of *FLEXIBLE*—aside, perhaps, from the world of work, though this is a broad category. Despite the fact that Tognini-Bonelli attributes a favourable prosody to *FLEXIBLE*, she points out that collocational profiles may prove to be of little help in identifying semantic preferences (and therefore in identifying prosodies):

> With *flexible* we find that the positive evaluation is realised in a variety of ways which are not picked up by a computer program that focuses on the recurrent co-selection of individual words. A collocational profile is best read as a confirmation of observations in the concordance, after the analyst has familiarised him/herself with the repeated patterns.
> (Tognini-Bonelli 2001:24)

In other words, number crunching can only take you so far. Indeed frequency lists alone can be misleading (see Baker 2006:71). The BNC profile of *NAKED EYE*, for instance, contains verb forms such as *detect*, *spot*, *spotted*, *appear*, *perceived*, *viewed*, *recognised*, *read*, *studied*, *judged*, and adjectives such as *apparent*, *obvious*, *evident*, *visible*, which despite suggesting semantic preferences, on their own do not convey the prosody of difficulty proposed by Sinclair (1996a:87–88). If anything they suggest the opposite. However, the profile also features a significant percentage of negative particles, as well as words such as *barely*, *just* and *rarely*. It is not

until we make the move from the collocational profile to the concordance itself, or at least to a cluster analysis, that we see that combinations such as *barely visible to*, *was not obvious to* are frequent and would indeed appear to convey some type of difficulty.

A concordance, on the other hand, provides lines of text, one below the other, with the search word along the central axis. The concordance, as will be argued in Chapter 6, presents text in a way which is at once innovative, fascinating and bewildering, and which has strongly influenced descriptions of semantic prosody.

Stage 2 of a corpus investigation concerns more specifically the way corpus analysts identify collocations and semantic preferences—whether accessed via profiles or concordances—and then 'translate' these into semantic prosody, i.e., how they convert data into evidence. This is a delicate, mercurial moment because it is highly interpretative, involving subjective judgements about fragments of text which have been removed from their natural habitat and forcibly juxtaposed with other fragments of text to which they may have no discernible link aside from the keyword. Indeed, as will be suggested later, the very fact of juxtaposing fragments of text within a concordance may suggest links which are simply not there.

This interpretative stage will be the focus of the following sections. First of all, let us consider the fact that semantic preference, and therefore semantic prosody, rests heavily upon the notion of semantic sets, and/or semantically consistent collocates.

5.2.1   Semantically Consistent Collocates

5.2.1.1   *Collocates and Collocations*

According to Firth (in Palmer 1968:181), the collocations of a given word are:

> statements of the habitual or customary places of that word in collocational order but not in any other contextual order and emphatically not in any grammatical order. The collocation of a word or a 'piece' is not to be regarded as mere juxtaposition, it is an order of *mutual expectancy* [original italics].

This implies that collocation is basically quantitative, entailing statistical significance and not "mere juxtaposition". Hoey (1991:7) notes that "collocation has long been the name given to the relationship a lexical item has with items that appear with greater than random probability in its (textual) context", while Baker (2006:95–96) affirms that

> All words co-occur with each other to some degree. However, when a word regularly appears near another word, and the relationship is statistically significant in some way, then such co-occurrences are referred

to as collocates and the phenomena of certain words frequently occurring next to or near each other is collocation.

According to McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006:82–83), the idea that collocation is contingent upon habitual co-occurrence is widely accepted by corpus linguists. However, the application of this within the domain of semantic prosody is not systematic. As reported in earlier chapters, Louw (1993:157) defined semantic prosody as a "consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates", and, years later (2000:60), as "a form of meaning which is established through the proximity of a consistent series of collocates", while for Bublitz (1996:9) semantic prosody is contingent upon the identification of a "semantically consistent set of collocates". Although both authors—like many others—use (the noun) 'collocate' very frequently, it becomes clear that they do not construe it in any sort of statistically significant way, or better, for Louw and Bublitz collocates do not appear to depend upon relationships of *habitual* co-occurrence between the node and its co-text. Certainly the data they use to identify semantic prosody would suggest that the 'collocates' referred to are no more than simple co-occurrences, i.e., there is no mention of any frequency of co-occurrence between node and collocate. Bublitz (ibid.:20–21), for example, reproduces a concordance to *SOMEWHAT* from the London Lund Corpus (Table 5.1).

Although Bublitz advises caution in identifying semantic prosody on the basis of such limited data (only 15 occurrences of *SOMEWHAT* in a corpus of half a million words of spoken discourse), it is clear that the author is not concerned here with habitual co-occurrence: the 'collocates' upon which the (unfavourable) prosody of *SOMEWHAT* is based are all

Table 5.1   Concordance to 'somewhat' in Bublitz 1996

1. a	*somewhat*	nasty pretty reasonable
2. a	*somewhat*	lengthy hearing her charges
3. a	*somewhat*	analogous footing to the
4. being	*somewhat*	dirty and slightly
5. being	*somewhat*	different on the teaching
6. a	*somewhat*	indiscreet observation referred to
7. homes	*somewhat*	occasionally and very occasionally
8. I	*somewhat*	took Stalker's part
9. is	*somewhat*	predictable well now if
10. is	*somewhat*	of a madman in
11. myself	*somewhat*	at sea when it
12. perhaps	*somewhat*	extravagant living I think
13. being	*somewhat*	older and yet at
14. wet	*somewhat*	bleak not very warm
15. you've	*somewhat*	less the probability of

different from each other, with no suggestion whatsoever that any of these co-occurs significantly with the node. Earlier in his article (ibid.:10) Bublitz makes a reference to Sinclair's observations regarding the phrasal verb *SET IN*: "Without using the term *semantic prosody*, Sinclair observes that, overwhelmingly, the collocates (*rot*, *disillusion* etc.) 'refer to unpleasant states of affairs' (1991:74)". Yet in reality Sinclair, advisedly, does not use the term 'collocates' here, preferring "the subjects of *set in*" and the more general "the main vocabulary" (Sinclair 1991:75).

Now it might be objected that this is simply splitting hairs, that basically what is being discussed here is the phenomenon of co-occurrence, whether the relationship between the node and the single co-occurrences is significantly frequent or not. Yet it is a distinction worth making, because the very raison d'être of semantic prosody, and perhaps its greatest strength, rests upon the fact that it is not, or not only, a collocational phenomenon. This crucial aspect is stressed by Hoey (1997:5), who comments on Sinclair's discussion of semantic prosody within the framework of the idiom principle:

> this [the idiom principle] is not a satisfactory categorisation, since there is no requirement that a semantic-prosodic association should be in the case of any particular item a regular association. When a new disease is found, it can immediately be added, for example, to the list of things that can be *caused*; we do not have to wait until it has become common enough for it to figure in calculations of collocations.

The author continues (ibid.): "Of course . . . semantic prosody will include many items that are also collocations but what makes the notion so useful is that it cannot be subsumed by its collocations".[1] As noted in 5.2 above, Hoey discusses the example *TRAIN AS A*, whose co-occurrences in the corpus he uses include a number of "strong collocates" (*teacher*, *nurse*, *lawyer*), but also a plethora of co-occurrences which would not qualify as collocates in the statistical sense (*cobbler*, *concentration-camp guard*). Indeed they may simply be one-offs.

A further objection might be that I am unfairly assuming (partial) synonymy between the terms 'collocate' (as a noun) and 'collocation', i.e., I am assuming that both terms should equally embrace the notion of habitual co-occurrence, whereas in reality—the objection might continue—'collocation' rests upon habitual co-occurrence, but 'collocate' (as noun) does not. In other words, the latter is used to indicate the immediate juxtaposition of words and nothing more. This distinction would seem to be borne out by Stubbs (2001a:29), who having defined collocation as "frequent co-occurrence", later remarks that in the immediate environment of *HITHERTO* "there is one recurring but variable phrase [*hitherto unknown*], plus a wide scatter of other collocates, none of which are individually frequent" (cf. Bernardini and Aston 2002:286–287).

My counter-objection to this would be that it is simply not the case that 'collocates' as noun always corresponds to 'mere co-occurrences', or, for that matter, that 'collocation' infallibly denotes habitual co-occurrence. For confirmation of the former one need only re-read the definition from Baker (2006:95–96) above, in which collocates are defined as statistically significant co-occurrences, and for confirmation of the latter it suffices to have a look at Partington (1993:188–190), and in particular his reference to "the sheer novelty of a collocation" (188). It would seem if anything that the respective semantic boundaries of 'collocate' and 'collocation' are rather misty.

My argument, therefore, is that although it may well be the case that Louw and Bublitz *do* intend a distinction between 'collocation' as habitual co-occurrence and 'collocates' as mere juxtaposition, I am not convinced that their readers could realistically be expected to be sensitive to this distinction which in any case is not applied consistently across works on semantic prosody. Further, even if readers *were* sensitive to it, they would still be left to work out the meaning of 'collocate' as verb and perhaps in particular of the adjectives 'collocational' and 'collocative'; it seems to me that when Louw talks of a "collocative clash" (1993:157—see 1.1.2 for the full quotation) he is not concerned only with (habitual) collocation. Yet the distinction is an important one, precisely because semantic prosody might come across as a rather feeble notion if it were to be restricted to (habitual) collocation.[2] As Hoey (2005:16ff) underlines, semantic association / semantic preference is precisely what collocation cannot account for. And it is principally semantic preference which 'feeds' semantic prosody.

I shall argue in Chapter 6 that those misty boundaries of 'collocation' and 'collocate' may have weighty implications for the way we read and interpret corpus data.

A final point. A potential rejoinder to the above is that what is really meant by 'collocation' in studies on semantic prosody constitutes a broadening of its traditional interpretation in order to accommodate the relationship between an item and its semantic preferences, i.e., lexical items can 'collocate' with semantic sets just as much as they can 'collocate' with words/expressions. This is certainly the impression one recurrently receives in the literature on the subject, as exemplified by the comments on semantic prosody quoted in Chapter 1 (for example in 1.1.5 and 1.3). Now some might feel that this is stretching the conceptual boundaries of collocation a little too far, though in the context of semantic prosody it might even be defended—it could with justification be argued that what semantic prosody is primarily contingent upon is semantic preference, and that whether the item has a relation of *habitual* co-occurrence with any of its co-text is something of an irrelevance. The prosody ascribed to *SOMEWHAT* discussed earlier in this section rests upon the unpleasantness of most of its co-occurrences, but whether *SOMEWHAT* enters into a relationship of typicality with, say *nasty* or *bleak* is a purely secondary consideration. If one were to make this radical move, however, it would make more sense to

simply remove collocation from the semantic prosody equation altogether and give more weight and scope to the category of semantic preference, in part because broader interpretations of the term 'collocation' might confound the uninitiated.

Such a move would, however, fly in the face of Sinclair's model of the unit of meaning (see 1.1.4 and 4.2), since it would collapse his distinction between collocation and semantic preference. Although it is true that Sinclair has defined collocation as (1991:170) "the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text", he is always careful to differentiate the relationship 'item to item' from 'item to semantic set'. For instance, in his analysis of the unit of meaning containing the core item *NAKED EYE*, in the category 'collocation' he lists *see*, *seen*, *visible*, *invisible*, and these are firmly based on individual relationships of frequency between the core item and its co-occurrences, whereas the category 'semantic preference' includes all sorts of words indicating visibility which do not co-occur frequently with the core item, e.g., *spot*, *perceived*, *viewed*, as well as the collocates *see*, *seen*, *visible*, *invisible* (Sinclair 1996a:86). Thus if we wish to broaden the meaning of 'collocation' to include the relationship between item and semantic preference, it would seem advisable to acknowledge the degree to which this move departs from Sinclair's model.

5.2.1.2 *Semantic Consistency*

It would thus be more accurate to state that semantic prosody is contingent upon the broader phenomenon of co-occurrence rather than collocation alone. But what type of co-occurrence? In Chapter 1 it was noted that definitions and explanations of semantic prosody often have recourse not only to the notion of typical co-occurrence but also to those of semantic sets and semantic consistency. As reported in 5.2.1.1, Bublitz (1996:6) tells us that semantic prosody (my italics in the following quotations) "is based on a *semantically consistent set* of collocates", and Louw (2000:57) writes that "semantic prosody refers to a form of meaning which is established through the proximity of a *consistent series* of collocates". Stubbs (1995:25) notes that "it is becoming increasingly well-documented that words may habitually collocate with other words from a *definable semantic set*", while according to Hunston and Francis (1999:137), "a word may be said to have a particular semantic prosody if it can be shown to *co-occur typically* with other words that belong to a *particular semantic set*".

Such notions, however, are perhaps more complex than they seem. What do we understand by (particular) semantic sets, semantic consistency, and typical co-occurrence? It seems safe enough to postulate that *NAKED* typically co-occurs with *eye*, but with what does *PROVIDE*, often cited as an example of a word associated with (favourable) semantic prosody, typically co-occur? In the 200-million word corpus used by Stubbs (2001a:65), some of its top collocates were *information*, *service*(*s*), *support*, *help*, *money*, *protection*, *food*,

care. And perhaps this answers the question: *PROVIDE* typically co-occurs with *information*, *service*(*s*), *support* etc., since these are its most typical co-occurrences. Yet these do not constitute an obvious semantic set, they do not manifest any obvious semantic consistency. Does *money* belong to the same semantic set as *food*? Is *information* semantically consistent with *protection*? Clearly not, unless we propose that these words all belong to the semantic set of 'being provided', in which case the argument starts chasing its tail.

Of course *PROVIDE* is of interest to analysts of semantic prosody because it appears to have a strikingly large percentage of co-occurrences denoting *conventionally favourable* states of affairs. So, the response to the above question 'With what does *PROVIDE* typically co-occur?', could be (aside from a list of the co-occurrences themselves) words and expressions representing conventionally favourable states of affairs. This is, however, a mightily broad category with thousands upon thousands of possible members, and does not mean that these co-occurrences belong to a semantic set as such, any more than it means that they are semantically consistent. Therefore 'sets' of collocates, or of co-occurrences in general, which have been identified as either favourable or unfavourable may have no other semantic feature in common than this, i.e., 'favourableness' or, so to speak, 'unfavourableness'. When Stubbs (1995:29), having listed some common co-occurrences of *CAUSE* (*accident*, *alarm*, *concern*, *confusion*, *damage*, *death*, *delay*, *fire*, *harm*, *trouble*), writes that "it is obvious to the human analyst that these words are semantically related", he presumably posits a common element of negativity (though even this seems controversial), since any other semantic link between, say, *delay* and *death*, would not be obvious at all.

All these are interesting developments if we consider that back in 1987 Sinclair, when discussing the co-occurrences of the verb *SET IN*, had confined himself to the observation that they "in general, refer to unpleasant states of affairs" (1987:155)—he did not imply (as previously noted) that such co-occurrences possessed the status of collocates, nor did he imply that they belonged to a specific semantic set. Subsequently Sinclair pointed very strongly to the idea of co-occurrences within semantic sets (such as, for example, a set corresponding to the notion of 'visibility') in his description of the unit of meaning, but most of the prosodies which have been identified in the literature are labelled simply positive (good, pleasant, favourable, desirable) or negative (bad, unpleasant, unfavourable, undesirable), and are *not* based in any real sense on semantically consistent sets of co-occurrences. We may thus note a further discrepancy between the methodology adopted by Sinclair, where the category of 'semantic preference' connects directly with the notion of specific semantic sets, and that adopted by many other authors, for whom 'semantic preference' is no more than a preference for either pleasant or unpleasant states of affairs.

The question is discussed by Whitsitt (2005:290), who underlines that, though many studies of semantic prosody avail themselves of the notion of

'habitual collocates', "what is 'habitual' is not the repetition "of the same word, or the same form, or the same material signifier" but the repetition of what is interpreted as being "the same immaterial signified, or meaning, or content". In such studies very often the only "same immaterial signified" of the co-occurrences resides in their pleasantness or unpleasantness.

5.3   INTERPRETING THE CORPUS DATA

In the following sections it will be argued that inferring prosodies from corpus data is a delicate process, not only because different analysts have different views of the world, but also because the identification of prosodies leans heavily upon the way the analyst approaches the network of relationships and interactions existing between the various constituents of any given concordance.

5.3.1   Pleasant and Unpleasant Co-occurrences

It was observed earlier that most of the prosodies discussed in the literature are classified as simply good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, favourable or unfavourable, and that the assignment of such prosodies rests upon the frequency of an item's pleasant / unpleasant co-occurrences. Yet classifying co-occurrences as favourable or unfavourable is anything but straightforward, in part because what is one analyst's meat is another analyst's poison. With regard to the co-occurrences he listed for *SET IN*, Sinclair had pointed out that "not one of these is conventionally desirable or attractive" (1991:75), and indeed they are a decidedly grisly bunch (see 1.1.1). Nevertheless it seems clear that reaching any sort of unanimity about what is conventionally favourable or unfavourable is a mammoth task, though earnest attempts have been made—see, for example, Osgood et al. 1957, Dilts and Newman 2006. The categories of evaluation supplied by *Appraisal* theory can also be of assistance in this respect, e.g., Martin (1999), Kaltenbacher (2006), Coffin and O'Halloran (2006). Bednarek (2008) provides an important model of evaluation comprising ten evaluative parameters: comprehensibility, emotivity, expectedness, humorousness, importance, possibility/necessity, reliability, evidentiality, mental state, style, and then goes on to emphasise how these often overlap to create sometimes complex "evaluative interplay".

Let us imagine, for instance, that during a corpus search we find the words *exam* and *exams* as co-occurrences of our keyword. Are exams to be considered conventionally favourable or unfavourable? Even if we narrow this concept down to 'end-of-year exams at university level', there is still no simple answer. For students, they might be favourable because they provide a passport to graduation and an important qualification, or because the students know all the answers, but they might equally be unfavourable because they involve hard preparatory work, feeling uptight, and being stooped over

a desk for three or four hours if the exam is a written one; not to mention how teachers feel about them. Similarly, Thompson and Hunston (1999:1) note that the combination *practically deserted* can be very favourable or very unfavourable, depending on the context. What makes the phrasal verb *SET IN* stand out is that most of its subjects seem unremittingly grim, whichever way you look at them (see again, however, Section 2.1). But other words and expressions examined in the literature are not like this. I have already considered the case of *BENT ON* (2.2.2). Now let us examine a BNC concordance for *UNDERGO* (Table 5.2), a verb which has been associated with a bad prosody (Stubbs 2001a:89–95, Partington 2004a:150):

Table 5.2   BNC Concordance to 'undergo' in All Its Forms (Random 30/2,434, Alphabetical Sorting at R1, R2)

1. similar short term outlook to those	*undergoing*	'elective' transplantation. The
2. to political democracy, this country	*underwent*	. . . no inner conversion. She
3. any raid I know'. The CCO's position	*underwent*	a fundamental change in March
4. organ proper to each sense'—has	*undergone*	a good deal of refinement. Within
5. Right Hon. Jeremy Thorpe recently	*underwent*	a new and innovative neurosurgical
6. proper time interval between A and B	*undergoes*	a strain of amplitude. Thus the
7. and hepatocytes of liver allografts	*undergoing*	acute rejection. In previous reports
8. series of gross acting characters	*undergoing*	all manner of grotesque facial
9. equivalent of the death in the desert	*undergone*	by Foucauld. It shows Christianity
10. equally important for patients who have	*undergone*	cardiac surgery or sufer from
11. Excluded because they had previously	*undergone*	colectomy for refractory colitis.
12. forward the nature of the game has	*undergone*	considerable changes. For a time
13. illumination that he himself has	*undergone*.	Despite reviewers' complaints to
14. ether therapy. Forty four patients	*underwent*	extracorporeal shockwave lithotrips
15. socialization experiences the child	*underwent*	in its family circumstances.
16. Britain and France are currently	*undergoing*	major changes, and in both countries
17. Aspdin's day cement manufacture was	*undergoing*	relatively rapid development
18. North American plate boundary had	*undergone*	significant changes over the past
19. Conservative political thought has also	*undergone*	some changes in recent
20. appreciate that with time both parties	*underwent*	some degree of ideological
21. The central print department has	*undergone*	some re-organisation, resulting in
22. Crisis. Nevertheless, the parties did	*undergo*	some transformation as they adapted
23. members of a firm, these rules will	*undergo*	some variation. Thus, when a partner
24. CRIME, TOOK THE POWDER AND	*UNDERWENT*	THE CHANGE IN THE
25. the target languages themselves are	*undergoing*.	The need continually to monitor
26. destined for a life in isolation before she	*underwent*	the operation. Three more
27. before going into hospital in July to	*undergo*	the postponed operation upon his
28. appearance and even sex, the patient	*undergoing*	the regression is none the less
29. follow up of severely ill patients who	*underwent*	cardiac transplantation.
30. in controls and in patients who had	*undergone*	vagotomy and pyloroplasty

I shall not go into any great detail here, since Stubbs (2001a:89–95) makes a thorough analysis of the lexical environment of *UNDERGO* in the corpus he uses, though his observations appear to be based upon the base form of the verb alone. He identifies an unfavourable prosody, pointing out (ibid.:92) "characteristic examples from the concordance lines":

- he was forced to *undergo* an emergency operation

- his character appeared to *undergo* a major transformation

- each operative had to *undergo* the most rigorous test

- will *undergo* extensive skills and fitness training

- forced to become refugees, to *undergo* further migration and further suffering

In these examples it will be noticed that of the things or states of affairs which are undergone, only one, it seems, can be unequivocally identified as conventionally unfavourable, and that is *further suffering*. Expressions such as *major transformation* and *fitness training* may be favourable or unfavourable, and clearly cannot be labelled without further context. The same goes for all the various surgical operations which are 'undergone'. In Table 5.2 we find *elective transplantation*, *cardiac surgery*, *colectomy*, *the operation*, *the postponed operation*, *urgent cardiac transplantation*, *vagotomy and pyloroplasty*. Are these conventionally unfavourable? It goes without saying that we would all rather be healthy and not require any sort of hospitalisation at all, and seen from this angle a surgical operation is indeed unfavourable. However, ill health is part of life, and many of us need operations in order to get better or to save our lives. Now since improved health and saved lives are conventionally favourable things, one needs to think twice before labelling as unfavourable the surgical operations which can allow us to enjoy such things. Stubbs adds (ibid.:90), however, that many of the things undergone are "by implication unpleasant, since they are *considerable*, *dramatic*, *drastic*, *extensive*, *fundamental*, *major*, *profound*, *radical*, *significant*". Since all of these adjectives can commonly describe positive things or states of affairs—for instance *IMPROVEMENT* or *CHANGE FOR THE BETTER*—the reader might wonder why they are considered to contribute to unpleasant implications. It is also observed (ibid.:90) that a significant presence to the left of *UNDERGO* is represented by words and expressions conveying the idea of coercion, for example *forced to*. In the concordance supplied by Stubbs, *forced to* occurs here and there, and might be construed as unfavourable, or at least as representing 'unwillingness'. Having said that, it should be borne in mind that the author's concordance concerns only the base form of *UNDERGO*, which very often corresponds to the infinitive, and the concordance therefore contains a higher percentage of left-hand structures requiring the infinitive than does a concordance for *UNDERGO* in all its forms (the question of the base form of a verb as

keyword was discussed in 4.3.2). Indeed in the random BNC selection of all forms of *UNDERGO* in Table 5.2, not only does the idea of coercion appear to be absent, but even the instances of incontestably unfavourable co-occurrences are few and far between. (See also Bernardini and Aston (2002:292–293), who comment on Stubbs' (ibid.:49) analysis of the co-occurrences of *CAUSE*.)

The situation is summarised by Dilts and Newman (2006:233) who, with reference to studies on semantic prosody, comment that

> the researcher is required to make evaluative judgements in the absence of a set of principled criteria to guide the evaluation. Terms such as 'good' or 'bad', 'positive' or 'negative' etc. are introduced at will and without much care taken to explain the basis for the judgement. This aspect of semantic prosody would appear to warrant more attention than it has so far received. In fact, the issue is rarely even addressed in the typical prosody study.

5.3.1.1   *Pleasant and Unpleasant Co-occurrences: Further Examples*

Here are some further examples in studies on semantic prosody of contestable interpretations of data within a framework of pleasantness and unpleasantness.

Tognini-Bonelli (2001:19–21) examines the word *FICKLE*, citing the decision by the *Cobuild* team in their 1995 dictionary to assign to it a prosody of disapproval. The author supports this decision, though her support appears to rest upon the fact that *FICKLE* co-occurs with "people, whether women (*she*, *Marianne*, *mistress*), unreliable men/people (*foreigners*, *young men*, *new-found friends*) or masses (*the mass favour*, *voters*, *opinion polls*, *public approbation*, *fans*); things that have to do with fortune and luck (*National Lottery*, *fortunes*, *appetites*); the world of *fashion* and *pop* music; and the *weather*" (19). It cannot be said that the various groups of co-occurrences have much to do with each other (*mistresses* or *foreigners* are not normally associated with *opinion polls* or the *National Lottery*), and despite a preference such as 'large numbers of people', no other immediately identifiable preference springs to mind.

Tognini-Bonelli (ibid.:20) then states that "we can conclude that to be defined as *FICKLE* is a criticism in the English language". It is undeniable that *FICKLE* does indeed come across as a criticism. It may correspond to the (vast) group of terms defined by White (2004:231) as "specific words or fixed phrases which explicitly carry a negative or positive sense in that the positivity or negativity would still be conveyed even if the wordings were removed from their current context" (see also 2.2.1). Yet the connection made by Tognini-Bonelli between the criticism conveyed by *FICKLE* and the lexical environment of *FICKLE* is not transparent. Later (2001:20) the author

records that *notoriously* "figures very prominently in the collocation profile, and exemplifies the very negative semantic prosody associated with *fickle*". *Notoriously* would certainly appear to be a 'bad' word, and again seems to fit the bill in terms of White's definition, but it is the only recognisably bad word in the profile supplied, while one would expect an unfavourable prosody to be based on a more recurrently unfavourable environment. Perhaps the suggestion is that co-occurrences of *FICKLE* such as *foreigners*, *fans*, *fortunes*, *public approbation* and *pop music* could be construed as unfavourable too, but this is not in any way an obvious step.[3] Whereas it may well be true that in the concordance for *FICKLE* these words appear in an unfavourable light, this seems to be due more than anything to the fact that they have been qualified as fickle, whose basic meaning is far from complimentary. Along similar lines see Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1996:169), who construes *bath*, *water*, *night*, *winter*, *silence*, *blood*, *station for a train*, *response*, *comfort* and *legal doctrine* as being some of the typically negative co-occurrences of *COLD*.

A final example. Partington (2004a:150), commenting on Stubbs' discussion of the semantic prosody attributed to *UNDERGO*, underlines that right-hand co-occurrences of this verb often include the semantic fields of medicine, tests and change, and then observes that "these words are often qualified in less than favourable ways, e.g., *rigorous test, dramatic changes*". Since *rigorous* is defined in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* as 'extremely thorough, exhaustive or accurate', and 'strictly applied or adhered to' (though 'rigorous weather' is defined as 'harsh weather'), and *dramatic* as 'of or relating to drama', 'sudden and striking', 'exciting or impressive', the less than favourable element is not objectively or conventionally obvious. It seems possible that it is not so much the individual words *rigorous* and *dramatic* which convey the unfavourable element as the phrases *rigorous test* and *dramatic changes*, but this would require empirical support, since once again it is by no means self-evident (though Partington (ibid.:150) observes that "the semantic field of change is often associated with unfavourable prosody").[4] Alternatively it could again be argued that any unfavourable element attendant upon *rigorous* and *dramatic* derives from their juxtaposition with the unpleasant meaning of *UNDERGO*, which would ensure that *rigorous* and *dramatic* are interpreted in an unfavourable light.

The question that emerges here is with what procedures and parameters do we assess the semantic qualities of a given word's co-occurrences? If we make introspective, context-free considerations, for example, about *transformations*, *training*, *exams*, *cardiac surgery*, *young men* and *fans*, or about *rigorous* and *dramatic*, we may have no sound reasons for evaluating them as unfavourable, but if we assess them in relation to the phrases in which they appear, whether the node in question is (i) part of that phrase (*UNDERGO cardiac surgery*, *FICKLE young men*) or (ii) not part of it (*rigorous test*, *dramatic changes*), then they may come across as unfavourable, though it may be primarily the node word itself which is responsible for the unfavourable meaning.

5.3.1.2 *Ambiguous Negativity*

Before going any further a brief parenthesis is in order. It needs to be underlined that the situation regarding the evaluation of the favourable or unfavourable attributes of co-occurrences is further complicated by ambiguity attendant upon the terms 'negative' and 'negativity'. It has been noted in this book that certain words / units of meaning are recurrently described in the literature as being associated with a 'negative' semantic prosody, something which in turn is directly related to the 'negativity' of the lexical environment. In these cases 'negative' has been adopted as a synonym of 'unfavourable', but this is not always the case. Tognini-Bonelli (2004:15–16), for example, reports that during her corpus investigations she found that the word *LARGELY* typically co-occurred (15) "with a set of adjectives and verbs which had negative 'semantic fields', that is, they carried negative semantic meanings". This reference to negative semantic fields might initially give the reader the impression that the author is referring to unfavourable meanings. However, a concordance to *LARGELY* is then supplied, with the R1 occurrences highlighted. These are:

> *absent, dismisses, dried up, eliminated, extinct, ignored, illiterate, overlooked, shunned, toothless, unaudited, unconcerned, unforeseen, unknown, unread, unruffled, untested.*

The author comments (ibid.:16) that

> the negative semantic field is realised at the level of the word by a negative prefix like *un-* as in *un*concerned, *un*foreseen, *un*known, etc. or simply by a word with a negative meaning like *absent*, *ignored*, *extinct*, etc.

Indeed this combination of morphological and semantic factors is captured by the heading supplied for the concordance, i.e., "Morphological and semantic negatives in the context of *largely*". Thus, if my interpretation of this is correct, Tognini-Bonelli is stating that the significant presence, immediately to the right of *LARGELY*, of (i) the privative prefix *un-* and (ii) words indicating that—loosely defined—something is absent or missing (*absent*, *overlooked*, *extinct*) serves to create an "aura of negativeness" (ibid.:16). Whether an aura is created or not, Tognini-Bonelli's other observations seem perfectly defensible: "the morphological and semantic negatives" to the right of *LARGELY*, or at least the majority of them, may well be identifiable in terms of something being absent.

Note that the author has not claimed, at least not explicitly, that this quality of 'absence' is unfavourable, and indeed it would be controversial to do so. The absence of something (for example cancer) may of course be a good thing, and clearly the favourableness or 'unfavourableness' of the situations described by words such as *unruffled*, *unconcerned* and *unforeseen*

is impossible to judge without greater knowledge of the contexts in which they are used. Nevertheless, Tognini-Bonelli's use of the terms 'negative' and 'negativeness' (again, if I have construed them correctly) is in marked contrast with that of most other authors (including myself) commenting upon co-occurrence phenomena, who, as noted earlier, use these two terms—as well as 'negativity'—in connection with words and expressions describing unfavourable qualities. Personally I would feel more at ease with Tognini-Bonelli's use of these terms as described earlier, though the inevitable hazard of her reference to *LARGELY*'s "aura of negativeness" is that she risks being misunderstood, especially since later in the article (ibid.:20) she uses 'negativeness' in the 'unfavourable' sense when she writes that the co-occurrences of *FACE* as verb would suggest a "semantic prosody of negativeness: whatever you are likely to *face* is usually a very undesirable thing or event".

The danger is that the potential ambiguity of 'negative', 'negativity' and 'negativeness' may induce readers to construe co-occurrences like *unruffled* and *unconcerned* as necessarily describing something unfavourable, something which may result in a misinterpretation of the prosody.

The link between grammatical (rather than morphological) and semantic negativity is mentioned by Adolphs and Carter (2002:12), who discuss the "negative shading" of semantic prosody in a concordance to *POSSIBLY* in the 5-million word CANCODE corpus they adopt:

> In these propositions the negative attitude of the speaker is expressed which comes across through negation ('I couldn't possibly aspire to that') or by means of a syntactical question ('Can you possibly move your car?').

The posited connection between the grammatical negative / interrogative on the one hand, and the "negative attitude" of the speaker on the other seems tenuous, though investigation of the context and broader co-text of the two concordance lines in question would help to test the link hypothesised by the authors.

5.3.2 Co-occurrences: Lone Rangers or Socialites?

The arguments put forward in this chapter leave us in something of a quandary concerning the way we are to assess the semantic qualities of co-occurrences, something upon which semantic prosody depends for its lifeblood. For the sake of simplicity I shall for the present continue to focus upon the favourable / unfavourable dichotomy. Are we to evaluate the meaning of any given co-occurrence (i) on its own (e.g., *test*) with no explicit reference to its relationship with the node in question, or (ii) in terms of its relationship and interaction with the node (*UNDERGO a test*), or (iii) in terms of its combination with other co-occurrences of the node in question (*rigorous test*)?

Stated more simply, the issue at stake is whether co-occurrences are to be judged 'on their own merit' or on their relationship with other elements present in the broader unit of meaning, and this relates back to the question discussed in Chapter 4 of whether semantic prosody belongs to the word or to the unit of meaning. Louw (1993), whose influence on subsequent investigations was so extensive, apparently favours the former method. To take just one brief example, the author's conclusion that a negative prosody is to be inferred for *SYMPTOMATIC OF* (p.170) appears to rest upon the conventionally unfavourable nature of its co-occurrences (e.g., *something deeply wrong*, *parental paralysis*, *deeper and endemic tensions*, *numerous disorders*, *clinical depression*), with no mention of their interaction with other elements present in the phrase, and the same approach is implied when Sinclair analyses *SET IN*. However, as a rule Sinclair makes judgements which *are* based upon the semantic link between the co-occurrence in question and other elements present in the extended unit. In the author's analysis of prosodic features of *REGIME* (Sinclair 2003:17–21), the word *changes* in the following line (note 16 of the concordance) is classified as "good" (p.19):

- changes if his twenty-year old *regime* is to survive. This month marks the

The explanation for this (p.19) is that "changes have to be made, which implies that the regime is not good", i.e., if changes need to be brought in, then they are presumably designed to improve something which is bad (the regime). Therefore the proposed changes are a good thing, or at least a good idea. This is important, because if one were to consider whether *changes* were conventionally favourable or unfavourable with no reference to specific co-text or context, I daresay the most obvious intuitive answer would be neither one the other, that one has to consider the case in question (cf. Section 5.3.1.1 and note 1).

Line 27 of Sinclair's analysis of *REGIME* is:

- the Bush administration to blast the *regime* publicly, in terms clear enough for

The co-occurrence *blast* is classified by the author as "bad" (p.19), though in this case there is no accompanying explanation. Analysed in general terms, *blast* might be considered conventionally unfavourable because it entails strong and perhaps hostile criticism, but analysed in relation to *REGIME*, one would imagine—according to the argument used by Sinclair for *changes*—that it should be interpreted as good, because, to paraphrase Sinclair's words, 'blasting has to be done, which implies that the regime is not good', i.e., the blasting is a good thing because it involves the stigmatising of something bad, and therefore might eventually help to get rid of the badness. Compare also Sinclair's (ibid.:119) concordance to *HAPPEN* as base form, where both the positive-sounding *compensation* (line 9) and *miracle* (line 15) on the one hand, and the negative-sounding

nightmare (line 5), *tragedies* (line 18) and *abuse* (line 22) on the other, are classified as contributing to prosodies which are "bad—definitely".

Stubbs (2001a:107–108) also appears to adopt the method whereby co-occurrences are judged in terms of their interaction with the node, when he describes *trade*, *fire*, *success*, *laughter* as "positive collocates" of *ROARING*. Bernardini and Aston (2002:291) point out that *fire* "would not always seem positively connoted", its most frequent co-occurrences in the BNC being *brigade*, *extinguishers*, *extinguisher*, *machine-gun*, *log*, *lit*, *brigades*, *chariots*, *anti-aircraft*, *sniper*, *opened*, *blazing*, *fire*, *embers*, *crackling*, *electric*, *caught*, *gas*, *burned*, *engine*. Certainly on an intuitive level *fire* comes across as neither exclusively positive nor exclusively negative, so why should it be listed as a positive co-occurrence of *ROARING*? Because, as Bernardini and Aston note, a favourable meaning for *fire* is inferred from the collocation *roaring fire* rather than from the conventional meaning of the collocate *fire* (just as, for Stubbs, an *unfavourable* meaning of *fire* is inferred from the collocation *cause a fire*—see 5.2.1.2). The same may apply to the word *trade*, which generally speaking need not be construed as having an unswervingly positive conventional meaning. Compare also a concordance line reproduced by Louw (1993:164–166) as part of a concordance to *BENT ON*, reproduced and discussed earlier (Section 2.2.2):

- seen seems hell *bent on* expiating the great Fascist guilt. H

For me the word *Fascist* does not have favourable associations, and I'm not sure *guilt* has either, though a state of guilt may imply a (good) wish to repent. Similarly I do not automatically link *Fascist guilt* with favourable situations, but there may again be the suggestion of a commendable desire for atonement. The phrase *expiating the great Fascist guilt* brings out the element of atonement more clearly, and may be interpreted as favourable, while being *hell bent on* something could suggest either favourable or unfavourable tenacity. At the same time, the line taken as a whole may well reflect a healthy initiative. Thus our judgements about the line in question will depend not only upon our personal view of the world but also upon which chunk of the line we prioritise in our analysis.

The different approaches adopted may all be cogent in their own way, but it is clear that if contrasting procedures are applied across studies on semantic prosody, or even across single contributions, then the interpretative stage referred to in 5.3 becomes problematic, because a single piece of data may give rise to two diametrically opposed conclusions. The co-occurrence *miracle*, discussed earlier in this section, represents a conventionally favourable idea, and therefore might contribute to creating a favourable prosody, but if we take the view that miracles are required only when situations are bad enough to require a miracle, then *miracles* could be regarded as contributing to an unfavourable prosody.

Finally, to return momentarily to the co-occurrences of *REGIME* discussed earlier in this section, is *the Bush administration* to be considered good or bad in the concordance line quoted earlier? In relation to the node, presumably good, because it makes / will make / made a public condemnation of *REGIME*, which Sinclair describes as something bad. Whether the Bush (senior) administration is generally or conventionally favourable is a consideration I shall leave to the reader, though responses might reveal how personal such considerations are, and how subjective our judgements can be. As stated earlier, what is one analyst's meat is another analyst's poison.

5.3.3 Interpreting the Corpus Data: Co-occurrences and their Meanings

The assigning of a semantic prosody is thus contingent upon the way the corpus analyst forges semantic connections, both on the paradigmatic axis, i.e., from one concordance line to the next, and on the syntagmatic axis, i.e., in terms of the relationships existing between the various constituents of single lines. Yet forging semantic connections can be complicated, even when it looks easy, because so many words/expressions are polysemous. I would like to illustrate this—and the difficulties attendant upon the interpretation of corpus data in general—by considering the brief analysis by Louw (1993: 161–163) of a word combination in Philip Larkin's poem *Days*. Louw focuses on the line 'Days are where we live', claiming that despite the fact that the line "purports to offer happy associations", the reader is left "with inexplicable feelings of melancholia" (162), anticipating the theme of death later in the poem. Louw's claim is based upon his discovery that, in the original 18-million word *Cobuild* corpus he adopted, around two thirds of the co-occurrences immediately to the right of the node *DAYS ARE* consist in *over, gone* and *past*. This, it is suggested, tells us that "days are not so much *where we live* as where we *have* lived and where we are likely, possibly sooner rather than later, to die" (ibid.). Louw supplies the 21-line concordance from the corpus, stating that the profile which emerges from it is similar to that of a later 37-million word written (*Cobuild*) corpus (Table 5.3).

Louw's findings are extremely interesting, but need to be handled with care. Firstly, the co-text supplied for the 21 lines reproduced is extremely restricted, consisting of an average of 5 words to the left and 4 words to the right. As a result, Louw's claim that according to his data it is the prosody associated with *DAYS ARE* which gives rise to the sense of melancholia is far from straightforward: although it is undeniable that *over* and *gone* are the most frequent R1 occurrences in the concordance (*past* occurs just once), it is actually extremely difficult to determine from the limited data supplied whether or not the various occurrences can justifiably be grouped around the idea of melancholia, or around the related notions of regret,

Table 5.3   Concordance to 'days are' in Louw 1993 (Alphabetical sorting at R1)

1. t it yourself the prices those	*days are*	absolutely astronomica
2. ite 'The world is wide, no two	*days are*	alike, nor even two ho
3. ays are gone whenel. But those	*days are*	almost twenty years go
4. gless extinction when the grey	*days are*	done but who are reaso
5. o men for unequal pay. But the	*days are*	gone whenel. But those
6. or do I. The big beer drinking	*days are*	gone. They drank becau
7. nd cry for peace. My political	*days are*	good and over. I'm not
8. ople making these things these	*days are*	making money out of th
9. erage trawler when its fishing	*days are*	over – as the Morning
10. it was before. Those good old	*days are*	over because trout fis
11. Lourenco Marques. Alas those	*days are*	over. What did he die
12. o walk means that his babying	*days are*	over. The stroking cea
13. ade me regret that my dancing	*days are*	over. Rudolph couldn't
14. fate of Czechoslovakia. These	*days are*	over, and that is what
15. ng after me Granddad's working	*days are*	past walk along with m
16. a black black sky. But those	*days are*	rare and usually to be
17. f I had a striking clock. The	*days are*	stretching out again a
18. ness and constancy of country	*days are*	the very qualities tha
19. e the only movies I see these	*days are*	these nights, on the l
20. finances of old people these	*days are*	very much better than
21. rate that situation. The hard	*days are*	with us and they are c

nostalgia, sadness (Louw does not specify explicitly the nature of the prosody in question). Indeed only two (10 and 11) of the 21 lines suggest such associations unequivocally:

- it was before. Those good old *days are* over because trout fis

- Lourenco Marques. Alas those *days are* over. What did he die

At first glance there is also an expression of regretful melancholy in line 14:

- ade me regret that my dancing *days are* over. Rudolph couldn't

though if this were preceded by, for example, ' . . . has never m(ade me regret) . . . ' then such an interpretation would be less obvious.

Others are very hard to interpret without expanding the text, e.g., 12 and 14:

- o walk means that his babying *days are* over. The stroking cea

- fate of Czechoslovakia. These *days are* over, and that is what

or are incomprehensible (5):

- o men for unequal pay. But the *days are* gone whenel. But those

In the absence of more co-text, we are required to give the author the benefit of the doubt, and assume that he checked the expanded concordance lines (the 37-million word corpus no longer exists as such, since it had already been incorporated into the Bank of English when Louw wrote the article) in order to reach his conclusions. Yet there remains the question of the semantic consistency of the co-occurrences, raised in Section 5.2.1.2. Louw's conclusions rest squarely not only upon the notion that *over*, *gone* and *past* are synonyms, or at least that they possess common semantic features, but also upon the notion that in this concordance it is the common semantic feature of melancholia which prevails. But why should this attitudinal meaning prevail over other possible attitudinal meanings of these terms? The fact of something being *over*, *gone* or *past* may constitute, among others, a threat, a warning, an expression of relief ('Thank Heaven that's over!'), a promise, or an expression of joy (imagine a person just discharged from prison after 5 years, who is celebrating in the pub and yelling, beer in hand, 'my prison days are over!', or soldiers at the front jubilantly embracing and exclaiming 'The war's over'!). The element of melancholia construed by Louw would seem to hinge upon the notion that generally speaking whatever is 'over' or 'gone' must be something pleasant and that we therefore have feelings of nostalgia about it, but this need not be the case at all.

The analyst's interpretation of the data constitutes a subjective angle on what is empirically present in the corpus, and in consideration of the old adage *tot homines, tot sententiae*, a fair number of interpretations are possible. In the case in point, the analyst has to decide (i) whether the three terms *over*, *gone* and *past* may be placed in the same semantic bracket, (ii) whether the various occurrences of each of these terms taken *singly*, e.g., the various occurrences of *over*, may be placed in the same semantic bracket, (iii) which of their ranges of meanings apply to the analysis being undertaken.

A final remark about corpus investigations in Louw's 1993 article. Freeman (1995), cited by Tognini-Bonelli (2001:129, note 8), writes:

> I find excessive Louw's claim that 'semantic prosodies have, in large measure and for thousands of years, remained hidden from our perception and inaccessible to our intuition' (p.173). Rather, Louw's (quite sound) intuition found candidate semantic prosodies only confirmed by the corpus data.

Louw's rejoinder to this might be that Freeman is guilty of (vicarious) "twenty-twenty hindsight", i.e., "the tendency to claim that one 'felt' the presence of a form which was inaccessible to one's intuition until it was

revealed through research" (Louw 1993:173). However, this would leave wide open the question of why Louw made his *DAYS ARE* search in the first place. The question of what mechanisms trigger corpus searches will be taken up in Chapter 7 within a more general discussion of the role of intuition in corpus studies.

Although one sympathises with Freeman's reaction to the hyperbolic nature of Louw's claim, my angle on this is that Louw's "(quite sound) intuition" was *not* sufficiently confirmed by the corpus data (or at least not by the data supplied), and that the former simply overruled the latter. Note that the question of whether *DAYS ARE* really is associated with a prosody of melancholy or regret is for present purposes a secondary one. Certainly Louw's insights are fascinating, but my principal concern connects with how the author presents his data and the interpretation that arises therefrom.

5.4   SUMMARY

This chapter has examined the relationship between semantic prosody and corpus data, arguing that the link between them is perhaps not as inextricable as has been claimed. A brief review was offered of the ways corpus searches are carried out, and this was followed by a discussion of the notions of collocation and semantic consistency, both of paramount importance in the process of identifying prosodies.

It was then claimed that the interpretative methods used in the literature to identify semantic prosody may be very different from one author to the next, because (i) frequently hasty categorisations such as 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant' are the outcome of personal and potentially arbitrary points of view, because (ii) there are discrepancies concerning the extent of the textual chunk analysed, and because (iii) the relevant meaning of words appearing near the keyword in a concordance may not be clarified by the immediate lexical environment. In any case, it is argued, introspection may well prevail over what is actually observed in the corpus.

6   Semantic Prosody and the Concordance

The evidence of things not seen

6.1   CONCORDIA DISCORS: FEATURES OF THE CONCORDANCE

In this chapter I want to pursue the argument that many of the assertions made about semantic prosody in the literature are strongly influenced by the way corpus data, and more specifically concordances, are arranged for the user by the attendant software.

The concordance is quite unique. Its visual impact is extraordinary. It is hard to think of any other situation in which you would find the same word or expression positioned line after line down the middle of a screen or page, with text all around it. Or any other situation where you would view 20 or 30 snapshots of unrelated texts juxtaposed in such close proximity. Or any other situation where you would find text presented with such fearful symmetry.

The concordance is in a sense the jewel in the corpus linguistics crown, capable of assembling large, sprawling amounts of text(s) into neat rows, ready for inspection. It has finally given linguists the chance to put substantial quantities of text(s) under the microscope, with typical co-selection patterns being exposed and rendered analysable. In large general corpora, texts from all walks of life, produced by all sorts of different people of different ages, languages, breeds and religions, with varying intentions, agendas and objectives, are brought together in the corpus melting pot and given visibility by the concordance. The concordance has, one might go so far as to say, gone some way to taming *parole*, in the past so elusive and insubordinate. It really is a unique invention, allowing us privileged analysts to view text as it has never been viewed before. The concordance is the glorious epitome of abundance, of symmetry, of balance, of modernity. And, as its very name suggests, of harmony.

Yet the concordance is, in some respects, a methodical madness.

In the first place, it is extremely difficult to read. Sentences have the irksome habit of starting off-screen to the left and finishing off-screen to the right, and we are thus presented with text fragments, interrupted not only mid-sentence but often mid-word. This can be particularly off-putting and frustrating for the reader who is presented with the concordance on a printed page, e.g., as an illustration in an academic article. In this situation there is

not much readers can do, unless they take the trouble to find the corpus in question and gain permission to use it, something which may be far from straightforward.[1] If the concordance is on-screen, then it suffices to shift the cursor to the left or right, or to expand the text, for example by shifting to sentence or paragraph mode. This seems simple enough, but after shifting left and right between line mode and sentence / paragraph mode around 50 times, it becomes a toil, above all because we are simply not accustomed to reading text in this way. We are used to the traditional method of repeatedly reading from left to right and then down, and we are not used to seeing sentences lopped at the beginning and end of the line, nor to seeing the same word occurring repeatedly down the middle of the page.

Secondly, the sheer number of concordance lines produced by a given search can prove too discouraging for proper analysis. Notwithstanding the assistance of alphabetical sorting, and the methodology countenanced by Sinclair (2003:xiv) of using repeated, manageable selections of concordance lines in order to accumulate evidence, analysts may feel that they cannot achieve a clear overall 'picture' of the concordance. Hunston and Francis (1999:20) note more generally that the question of "how to investigate the large amounts of data available in a corpus is a crucial one to corpus linguistics, and one that no-one as yet is in a position to answer fully".

Thirdly, however much one is prepared to check the co-text, this overall picture remains fragmentary. Even a paragraph may be no more than a fragment of a much larger text with its own unique network of textual relationships. Unless one spends a prodigious amount of time examining co-text and context in the corpus, the effect might be that of operating within a contextual vacuum. Once again, as readers we find this unusual. Traditional reading methods almost always involve knowledge of source and context. Readers of a newspaper column, for example, usually have a clear idea of these: they will know the newspaper, how popular it is, whether it is regional or national, its political leanings, its rival newspapers, the section of the paper containing the column in question, the average length of the column, its typical language and register. They may recognise the style of the columnist, any topical references, any in-jokes, any rejoinders to other columnists etc. They will also expect the column to have a recognisable beginning, middle and end. Readers are comforted by familiar context. Where that context is absent, the effect can be perplexing. (This is by no means to imply that a newspaper column will mean exactly the same thing to all its readers. As Sinclair (1996b:110) points out: "An artefact like a book or newspaper will have as many interpretations as readers".)

Tognini-Bonelli (2001:3) provides an important summary of the main differences between a single text and a corpus. A text is (i) read whole, (ii) read horizontally, (iii) read for content, (iv) read as a unique event, (v) read as an individual act of will, (vi) an instance of *parole*, (vii) a coherent communicative event, whereas a corpus (i) is read fragmented, (ii) is read vertically, (iii) is read for formal patterning, (iv) is read for repeated events,

(v) is read as a sample of social practice, (vi) gives insights into *langue*, (vii) is not a coherent communicative event.

   Many of the issues I raise here have been discussed and rediscussed in works on corpus linguistics (see, for example, Baker (2006) and Stubbs (2007a) for interesting accounts), so I shall confine myself to focusing on what is my main claim here: that reading a concordance can prove to be a disorienting experience, and may distort our view of things. Indeed I wish to argue that, although it is often said that the concordance enables us to discover patterns which would otherwise be invisible (e.g., Stubbs 2007a:155), it may also make us see things which are not actually there. Our long-standing familiarity with more orthodox text structures (books, newspapers, manuals) may result in our misguidedly working on traditional assumptions when confronted with a concordance. In my view this has important repercussions for both the way we interpret data in general, something which will be examined in the following section, and for the way we theorise about semantic prosody, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

6.2   READING CONCORDANCES: IMPLICATIONS FOR DATA INTERPRETATION

The aspects outlined in the previous section may be considered to have the following implications for the interpretation of concordance data:

   Implication (i): There is a tendency to focus on the immediate environment to the left and right of the keyword. As Kennedy (1998:8) points out:

> CL has developed something of a life of its own within linguistics, with a tendency to focus on lexis and lexical grammar [. . .] This is partly a result of using methodologies such as concordancing where the contextual evidence available in a single line of wide-carriage computer print-out of 130 characters is sometimes too limited for the analysis of syntax or discourse.

Indeed the prioritisation of lexis is often taken to be, as Mahlberg (2007:193) puts it, one of the "key pillars of a corpus theoretical framework", and it is lexis—particularly its relationship with grammar—which constitutes the raw material of much of the theoretical discussion in corpus linguistics (ibid.:192). Yet a potential problem of this focus on the immediate environment is that in our 'normal' reading of single texts we are used to assuming that the text in question is actually on the page / screen in front of us, and this may result in a certain reluctance to move across to the 'wings' of the concordance. The human eye naturally alights upon what is more visually manageable in one glance, and this will be, above all with the aid of alphabetical sorting, what lies immediately to the left and/or right of the keyword.

Implication (ii): The perfect symmetry of the concordance, with its high-lighted keyword(s) splitting the screen down the middle and with an equal amount of text on either side, may give an illusory impression of balance and textual unity. So much so that users might temporarily forget that the various lines of text in the concordance may have absolutely nothing to do with each other aside from the fact that they share the word under observation. In other words, we might temporarily fail to recall that we are dealing with texts rather than text. As Hunston (2002:110) notes, "corpus search and processing techniques [. . .] will tend to obscure the character of each text as a text". The consequence of this may be the subconscious creation of a false relationship of cohesion between the individual lines visible on the screen.

Implication (iii): In a concordance the only unchanging element is the keyword. If a corpus is lemmatised, then we can retrieve all the forms of a given lemma, e.g., *lucky*, *luckier*, *luckiest*; *put*, *puts*, *putting*, but our key-word is more or less constant. The word under observation is thus in stark contrast with what may be highly varied text to the left and right of it. It constitutes the axis of the concordance, with the resulting impression that everything 'revolves' around it.

Implication (iv): As the axis of the concordance, the keyword is in central position. When concordances are reproduced in works on corpus linguistics, the keyword is often set apart from the text around it by means of italics, bold type or extra spacing. Notwithstanding the fact that syntagmatic relations between item and environment are certainly highlighted by concordancing, the effect may be that of distancing and separating the keyword from its syntagmatic environment.

Implication (v): The 'exposure' of data in a concordance may give the impression that meaning can be seen and observed. Concordances are able to lay bare item and close environment so efficiently that the temptation is to assume that meaning is exposed in the same manner, that we can directly observe meaning just as we can directly observe lexical environment.

All this may sound abstract, but I feel that each of these suggested implications actually finds support in the methods and observations found in studies on semantic prosody. In the next five sections I shall discuss the relevance for semantic prosody of each of the five implications above.

6.2.1   Implication (i): A Tendency to Focus on the Immediate Lexical Environment

The relevance of this implication to semantic prosody is fairly transparent. Analyses of semantic prosody tend to be based on observations made within the restricted concordance window mentioned by Kennedy above. The notions of co-occurrence and co-selection—within the domain of semantic prosody—basically correspond to co-occurrence and co-selection within a span of five or six words to the left and five or six words to the

right. Words and expressions occurring outside this window are rarely considered. I shall not discuss here whether this is a matter of theoretical relevance or simply convenience, but the fact remains that text to the left and right of this window appears to lie outside semantic prosody's remit. This has two major consequences, which are however linked.

The first is that the narrow confines of the 5:5 or 6:6 span may restrict our understanding of the individual lines, causing us to make hypotheses about the broader text and to assume things about the immediate environment which may not actually be present. This is the claim I made in 5.3.3 in connection with Louw's interpretation of *DAYS ARE*.

The second consequence is that the focus on a restricted span comes across as odd if we consider the emphasis of discourse and pragmatics in studies on semantic prosody, i.e., it seems inconsistent that a notion which purports to prioritise discourse should lose its strength once it steps outside the 5:5 window. Koller and Mautner (2004:224), on the subject of the identification of semantic prosodies as a basis for evaluating authorial stance, warn that

> care must be taken to look beyond the chosen collocational span or the standard concordance line [. . .] one must be careful not to miss hedges and distancing devices which may be located just outside the narrow frame selected.

Or, for that matter, several sentences away. When investigating the word *FEDERAL* in a corpus of editorials from *The Daily Telegraph*, Koller and Mautner (ibid.:223) found it better to use a span of 25 words to the left and right of the node. See also Dam-Jensen and Zethsen (2008:210) on the environment of *LEAD TO*.

6.2.2 Implication (ii): An Impression of Textual Unity

This implication, concerning how a concordance may give an erroneous impression of textual unity and cohesion, is less far-fetched than it might seem. Firstly, it was underlined in Chapter 5 that various authors, when discussing a word's co-occurrences, refer to the notions of semantic sets, and the semantic consistency of a word's 'collocates'. It was also noted that in many studies of semantic prosody this semantic consistency is confined to whether the co-occurrences are to be considered conventionally favourable or unfavourable. With this in mind, I shall try to illustrate this impression of textual unity with a BNC concordance to *UTTERLY* (Table 6.1), a word to which a negative semantic prosody has often been ascribed (e.g., Louw 1993:160–161).

According to the criterion of semantic consistency, *UTTERLY* has been assigned an unfavourable prosody because it has elements in its profile, such as *confounded*, *immature*, *manic* and *miserable*, which are 'semantically consistent', or belong to the same 'semantic set'.

Table 6.1 BNC Concordance to 'utterly' (Random 30/1,251, Alphabetical Sorting at R1)

		utterly	
1.	Germany's political map has changed	*utterly*	and it has no one of Strauss' size.
2.	Ireland, no prison was ever sealed so	*utterly*	and so completely that there was not
3.	the eve of the event and he said: 'I am	*utterly*	and totally hacked off. I've spent
4.	looking after. And she was hopelessly,	*utterly*	besotted with him. He was the man
5.	as the 'top keyboard at the moment' is	*utterly*	beyond me! K-board Described as
6.	'do you think?' Tom Reynolds was	*utterly*	captivated with himself. 'Clever of
7.	desserts can be consumed with an	*utterly*	clear conscience when you have
8.	room, but the 'Rule of Taste' has been	*utterly*	confounded by eclecticism. It is
9.	that period, quite frankly they're, they're	*utterly*	confused, they don't understand
10.	If all were clear, undilemmatic and	*utterly*	consistent for the members of a
11.	of the Durban Test the pitch was so	*utterly*	dead that Peter Pollock, at full
12.	and well-meaning, and so on; but so	*utterly*	deadly, my dear! Even Roger . . .
13.	have hindered me much and now so	*utterly*	discouraged me that the service I
14.	countries that, until lately, have been	*utterly*	excluded from consideration – those
15.	when the collection is launched it is	*utterly*	free from criticism by even the most
16.	P A Newton sees fit to resort to the	*utterly*	immature tactic of hiding behind a
17.	enough to see that it would ruin him	*utterly*.	In some ways the more temptation
18.	an academic career. Determined to be	*utterly*	dependent of Bart, he slowly worked
19.	about what was a difficult, trying and	*utterly*	maddening creature Nora was. It
20.	faces when they open them. The pace is	*utterly*	manic, the bickering relent less and
21.	Liberals and humanists had been	*utterly*	misconceived. The New Testament
22.	ankle business had made her feel	*utterly*	miserable and vulnerable. She'd
23.	his voice was rising. Charity's was	*utterly*	relaxed and quite level as she posed
24.	Duchamp's readymades) and some	*utterly*	routine panting over the outlandish
25.	him. The image was awesome and	*utterly*	seductive. My second memory is of
26.	to apply to the new religion the	*utterly*	unalterable condition that the ancient
27.	of adversity arose a hardened hero,	*utterly*	uncompromising, a succession of
28.	Deputy Speaker that this government is	*utterly*	unconcerned to carry out an obligation
29.	of use to scientists. It was, of course,	*utterly*	useless. Deliberate learning situations
30.	least one unprovable assumption, it is	*utterly*	wrong for any person to instruct a child

One wonders if there exists any other situation beyond a concordance where *confounded*, *immature*, *manic* and *miserable* would be placed within the same semantic set. Yet since they can all be qualified by *UTTERLY*, they may well appear in a concordance within just a short distance of each other, perhaps even one below the other, and in the company of many other apparently unpleasant words. The next move is as easy as it is false. The adjectives mentioned, and other co-occurrences of *UTTERLY* such as *deadly* and *useless*, are (i) all conventionally unfavourable, (ii) can all be qualified by *UTTERLY*, and (iii) may all appear together on screen as R1 co-occurrences of *UTTERLY*, neatly aligned with other words of unfavourable meaning. *Ergo*, they all belong to the same semantic set.

The drawback, as noted in 5.2.1.2, is that they do *not* belong to the same semantic set. There are millions of conventionally unfavourable things, people and states of affairs. Are we to lump all these together under the same conceptual heading? Both a mosquito bite and germ warfare are unfavourable: are they to be considered members of the same semantic set? By making this move we create a paradigmatic relationship of imagined semantic proximity between the various co-occurrences of the node.

There is a further pitfall, introduced in 5.2.1.1. Semantic prosody has been described in the literature as meaning which results from a form being imbued by its collocates, or from the proximity of a consistent series or set of collocates, and this again has been applied to *UTTERLY*. In 5.2.1.1 it was pointed out that in linguistics the term 'collocate' is usually used to describe words which co-occur frequently with the node. However we wish to define 'frequent', it needs to be remarked that many of the supposedly unfavourable co-occurrences of *UTTERLY* appear with it only once in the BNC (*confounded*, *deadly*, *misconceived*, *unalterable*, and *uncompromising*). So, to repeat the question asked in Chapter 5, why would we wish to bestow upon these 'one-offs' the status of collocates? The answer is in my view that we make a further false move. Take the combination *utterly unalterable*, a hapax legomena in the BNC. In other circumstances it seems extremely unlikely that *unalterable* would be considered to have a collocational relationship with *UTTERLY*. But when *unalterable* appears in a concordance on-screen among a whole 'pack' of co-occurrences, one below the other, all the way down the screen, it may insidiously 'convert' to the status of collocate, with the result that an imaginary syntagmatic relationship is established between *utterly* and *unalterable*. By making this barely perceptible move we create a false syntagmatic relationship of recurrent proximity between node and co-occurrence.

The two moves described are thus the result of relationships of imagined proximity, whether syntagmatic or paradigmatic, and the impression of proximity appears to be the result of the amassing of text fragments within a confined space.

Further, if we allow (i) that a single co-occurrence, though semantically quite different in meaning (aside from its unpleasantness) from the other co-occurrences of the same node, can be considered to occupy the same semantic set as those others, and if we allow (ii) that a single co-occurrence, though it occurs just once with the node in question, can be said to be a collocate of that node, then we are only one small step away from a far more perilous move, which is that of converting neutral-looking co-occurrences into pleasant or unpleasant ones.

As we have seen (5.3.1), a random selection from a concordance to *UNDERGO* in the BNC contains a number of (apparently) unfavourable right-hand co-occurrences such as *colectomy*, *vagotomy and pyloroplasty*. If we find in a concordance, above or below both these and other unfavourable-sounding (whether they are actually favourable or not—see

again 5.3.1) procedures within the same 'column', expressions such as *rigorous test* or *major changes*, we may assume that these must be unpleasant too, rolling them together with the more unfavourable co-occurrences. And the same may apply to a co-occurrence such as *uncompromising* in the *UTTERLY* concordance above, a co-occurrence which, when viewed among a mass of other words on the vertical axis such as *deadly*, *maddening*, *misconceived*, *miserable* and *useless*, may convert to something unfavourable notwithstanding that in the broader co-text in question it actually comes across as a positive, heroic attribute.

I would argue that the tendency to convert neutral-looking co-occurrences into pleasant or unpleasant ones (but usually the latter) is not uncommon in contributions on semantic prosody. Hunston (2002:61–62), for instance, examines the phrasal verb *SIT THROUGH* as a base form, noting that "it often follows *have to* or an expression indicating that pressure has been exerted, or an expression indicating that someone does not want to do something". These expressions include *he was forced to sit through*, *was unfortunate enough to sit through*, *even idle curiosity is no reason to sit through this sad dud*. And these observations would indeed appear to support the author's conclusion that *SIT THROUGH* is associated with a prosody of boredom and discomfort. However, Hunston goes on (ibid.) to furnish a separate concordance for all the other forms of the verb aside from the base form, reproduced in Table 6.2.

The author then notes (2002:62) that in many of these lines the verb-form

> is followed by an indication of a specific length of time (lines 1,3,5,7,14) or by an indication that the length of time is judged to be uncomfortably long (lines 8,10,20). In line 12, the indication of tedium comes before the verb.

Again these observations seem to me indisputable, but Hunston then concludes that "in over half the lines for *sat / sits / sitting through*, there is clear evidence" of the said prosody of boredom or discomfort, a conclusion which I find problematic. I would certainly not contest that *SIT THROUGH* as a phrasal verb has an unfavourable meaning which includes the idea of boredom and/or discomfort, nor would I necessarily take issue with the notion that the meaning suggested can be expressed in prosodic terms. Nevertheless I am not convinced that the prosody of boredom or discomfort may be evinced from anything like over half the concordance lines in question, and this is because the indication of a specific length of time or frequency, e.g., *an hour and 20 minutes* (line 7), *half-hour speech* (line 14), *many a summit* (line 13), are not infallible indications of something being *too* long or frequent, and therefore are not infallible indications of boredom or discomfort. Take line 3:

- with it. So the prospect of *sitting through* a 3- to 4-hour history of

Table 6.2   Concordance to 'sat/sits/sitting through' in Hunston 2002
(Alphabetical Sorting at R1)

1. nth, never mind the year, but having	*sat through*	90 harrowing minutes, I can
2. Van de Velde) and Andrew and we	*sat through*	a few videos and they showed
3. with it. So the prospect of	*sitting through*	a 3- to 4-hour history of
4. that I don't generally get while	*sitting through*	a movie. Simon: Tell
5. trial places on their clients.	*Sitting through*	a six-month trial as a
6. ggled simultaneously yesterday as he	*sat through*	a screening of the low-
7. already released five titles).	*Sitting through*	an hour and 20 minutes of
8. heading. He later revealed that he	*sat through*	boring public zoning
9. Red Sea, Moses-style. Those who've	*sat through*	Cecil B de Mille's epic film
10. but his patience was remarkable. He	*sat through*	endless negotiating sessions
11. Wayne-Katharine Hepburn classic. I	*sat through*	it twice and then came home
12. nnel should pay its viewers for	*sitting through*	live coverage of England
13. nsen: You know, Dan, you and I have	*sat through*	many a summit together and—
14. UN representative, Abdul Al-Anbari,	*sat through*	the half-hour speech, and
15. Mr Goldman Sr and his family had	*sat through*	the courtroom proceedings
16. by Domican. Domican, who has	*sat through*	the hearing, survived a mach
17. went to church with his parents and	*sat through*	the service and the sermon
18. in the MGM commissary, he not only	*sat through*	the following speech but
19. our home grown industry and having	*sat through*	this delightful, acid, piece
20. Yes we we went and	*sat through*	to the bitter end you see.

If we were to replace *sitting through* in this line with *watching*, then there would be no manifest indication of boredom or discomfort. Certainly we find an expression conveying "a specific length of time" (*3- to 4-hour*), but taken on its own this does not need to be unfavourable. The word *HOLI-DAY* also co-occurs frequently with specific periods of time (*her two-week holiday*, *a month's holiday*), but I do not think the analyst would necessarily wish to construe these as boring or too long. And if the oral exams at my university in Italy lasted 3–4 hours, I might well experience a sense of relief, since they can sometimes go on for days.

Now it might be contended that in line 3 the string *the prospect of* is likely to be followed by something unfavourable, but that would need to be stated and is in any case debatable. In reality the only element which incontestably ensures the unfavourable reading is *sitting through* itself, and this is true of the majority of the lines in the concordance supplied. I would not deny that these forms of *SIT THROUGH* have semantic preferences which include (i) 'a length of time' and (ii) 'boredom', but these on their own cannot all automatically convert to a formula such as 'something long and boring', at least not on the basis of the evidence supplied. Saying that something lasted a length of time is not the same as saying something was long, and certainly not the same as saying something was *too* long. A 5-minute wait, for example, might be quite short.

So why has Hunston claimed "clear evidence" for the prosody she has inferred? There would seem to be two possible explanations. Firstly, as discussed in Chapter 4, it could well be that the clear evidence in question is based not on the co-text alone, which in the concordance supplied (Table 6.2) is for the most part fairly neutral, but on the longer unit containing both the core item and its surrounds. If this is the case, however, the drawback is that, within this unit, the unfavourable meaning of the core item *SITS/SAT/SITTING THROUGH* is so dominant that it overwhelms the relative neutrality of much of the co-text, which becomes almost irrelevant. It would be rather like analysing a sentence (my example) such as *We were threatened by some lads with sticks*, where the sequences *some lads*, *with sticks*, or *some lads with sticks* could certainly be interpreted in an unfavourable light (i.e., 'nasty youths with weapons'), but only because of the overriding influence of the sense of menace conveyed by the verb.

Secondly, it could be that if the node looks as if it has a number of unfavourable co-occurrences (for *SITS/SAT/SITTING THROUGH* these would include *harrowing*, *boring*, and *endless negotiating*), then its more 'neutral' co-occurrences (*a few videos*, *many a summit*, *hearing*, *an hour and 20 minutes*) may involuntarily be 'converted' to unpleasant ones for reasons of a supposed semantic proximity which may be a direct consequence of their physical, vertical adjacency in the concordance. In the same way, the apparently more unfavourable environment of *SIT THROUGH* as base form may have influenced the analyst's judgements.

By amassing large numbers of textual occurrences and arranging them in rows and columns, the concordance encourages group power. Strength is gained through proximity with the pack, something which perhaps adds another dimension to Louw's assertion that words "usually hunt in packs" (1993:172 and 2000:55). But we need to consider whether it might not be the very structure of the concordance which encourages this pack mentality, creating a powerful impression of group cohesion and unity. Such cohesion and unity, however, above all within a large general corpus, may be no more than an optical illusion.

6.2.3   Implication (iii): The Constancy and Centrality of the Keyword

Implication (iii) focused on the fact that in a concordance the one more or less constant element is the keyword, while the text around it can vary considerably. The keyword, one might speculate, is apparently solid and unwavering, the text around it is not: a constant rock amid a turbulent sea of text. The rock is hit by the waves but does not hit them; it is acted upon rather than acting; it receives but does not give. Over time, its apparent solidity may gradually be eroded, it may begin to change shape as it is subjected to the relentless force of the waves and the winds which surround it. It is influenced and modified by its immediate environment.

This metaphor may seem bizarre, but it is no more than one metaphor among a cluster of others in studies on semantic prosody. It was noted in Chapter 3 that semantic prosody appears to attract metaphors, but one wonders if it is not the concordance itself which is the magnet. Perhaps it is ultimately the structure of a concordance which makes Louw (1993) suggest that a form is "imbued by its collocates", that makes other scholars suggest that a semantically neutral form 'takes on' or 'acquires' other meanings from its environment, or is 'tainted' or 'infected' by them. Fundamental to lexical grammar is that words interact and influence each other constantly, but the layout of the concordance, with the node on the vertical axis and surrounded by its co-text, may subliminally lead us to believe that the node is being acted upon rather than acting, an easy prey to the semantic forces around it.

The idea of semantic neutrality is implied by Whitsitt (2005:292–293) when he argues, with specific reference to Louw (1993), that "semantic prosody posits the idea of an empty form, or a word being innocent of meaning". This is ultimately because, Whitsitt argues: "When a word or pattern is selected for observation, it is methodologically imperative for the observer to suspend all meaning or content concerning that which is being observed". He continues (ibid.):

> In other words, what explains why Louw's form is empty is that it is simply the term under observation. As such, that term, according to empirical methodology itself, has been emptied, or had its meaning and content suspended.

Whitsitt's comments could be applied to all sorts of search methodologies in language study. For example, it could be that when we seek, in a bilingual dictionary, a foreign-language word which we have seen in context but whose meaning is not entirely clear to us, we temporarily "suspend" our hunches about its meaning and let the dictionary take over. And it may be that this suspension of meaning is particularly germane to investigations with a concordance—we may suspend our hunches about the meaning of the keyword and let the co-text take over. It is then only a short step further to hypothesise that the reasonably constant but essentially solitary nature of the keyword under observation, at the very centre of its environment, makes it an innocent and unreactive prey to the battering of the elements, a passive victim of the vicious forces at work all around it—Oliver Twist in the swirl of London, influenced by the likes of Fagin and the Artful Dodger. The 'pure', passive node is envisaged as acted upon rather than acting, as sinned against rather than sinning.

6.2.4 Implication (iv): The Lone Keyword

Implication (iv) concerns the fact that in a typical concordance the keyword is set apart from the text around it—by means of italics, bold or extra

spacing—and that this may give the impression it is somehow detachable from its co-text. While it is clear that syntagmatic relations between a word and its immediate environment can be highlighted by concordancing, the physical structure of the concordance may have the effect of *distancing* the keyword from its environment. Indeed this sense of distance may help to answer a question which was central to Chapter 4, i.e., why semantic prosody so often comes across in the literature as being a property of the word rather than of a longer sequence (indeed the ideas put forward in this and the previous section would appear to apply more readily to the notion that semantic prosody is the property of the word).

An example of this apparent distancing of a word and its co-text is perhaps work which analyses semantic prosody across languages, discussed briefly in section 1.2.2. It was noted that a number of contributions compare prosodies of near-synonyms across English and another language (Xiao and McEnery 2006: English / Chinese; Berber-Sardinha 2000: English / Portuguese; Munday forthcoming: English / Spanish; Partington 1998: English / Italian). One might argue that what is implicitly acknowledged in these studies is a fairly clean split between a word and its co-text, with the co-text being responsible for the prosody. As explained in 1.2.2, the authors in question depart from the premise that certain words belonging to different languages, in view of their similar basic meanings, can be regarded as near-synonyms. Having established what they believe to be nearly synonymous cross-language pairings, they then compare the prosodies of these pairings. Berber-Sardinha (2000), for example, compares the respective prosodies he identifies for *SET IN* as a phrasal verb and its Portuguese dictionary equivalents *MANIFE-STAR-SE* and *ESTABELECER-SE*, amongst others. Let us focus on one of these. It is stated that the environment of *ESTABELECER-SE* does not mirror the unfavourable environment of *SET IN*, and indeed the author concludes more generally that there are no direct equivalents for *SET IN* in Portuguese. However, since the author has chosen to compare them in the first place, he must be operating on the assumption that there is at least a basic *dictionary* equivalence between *SET IN* and *ESTABELECER-SE*, in which case his conclusion must ultimately be that these two verbs have similar basic meanings but are characterised by different prosodies.

However, approaching this from a different direction one could just as easily claim that *SET IN* and *ESTABELECER-SE* have different basic meanings, i.e., that despite a common semantic property of something 'starting / establishing itself', the meanings of the two verbs are fundamentally different. The same goes for Partington's (1998:77–78) observations regarding the "look-alike" words *IMPRESSIVE* and the Italian *IMPRESSIONANTE*, which "have very different semantic prosodies". While a componential analysis might well reveal a common semantic core such as 'striking', one could just as well argue that the two adjectives differ not so much in their prosodies as their denotational meanings—*IMPRESSIVE* means *good*, *of good standard*, e.g., *an impressive performance*, whereas *IMPRESSIONANTE* corresponds to

shocking or *extraordinary* (whether for good reasons or bad), e.g., *igno-ranza impressionante*—'shocking ignorance'; *velocità impressionante*—'extraordinary speed'.

Of course Partington's remarks have important pedagogical implications inasmuch as they stress the unreliability of 'false friends' across languages, but whether the difference between the two words should be expressed in prosodic terms is open to question. Compare also a monolingual example from Xiao and McEnery (2006:108), who, with reference to Tognini-Bonelli (2001:18–24), classify *FICKLE* and *FLEXIBLE* as "near-synonyms" with differing semantic prosodies. This classification as near-synonyms appears to assume that the core semantic element of these two terms is 'changeability' or something similar, but that the good prosody inferred for *FLEXIBLE*, and the bad prosody inferred for *FICKLE*, must lie outside that core, because otherwise the hypothesis of synonymy would not hold.

It may be only the semantic prosodist—or the componential analyst—who would wish to consider *set in / estabelecer-se*, *flexible / fickle*, as near-synonyms, but it seems legitimate to propose that criteria of near-synonymy should ideally include the respective prosodies in the first place, i.e., the decision that words are near-synonyms should be based upon an evaluation of both their basic meanings and their prosodies.

In short, behind a number of studies on semantic prosody lies the premise that the basic meaning of a word may be uncoupled from its prosody. In view of the fact that the notion of detaching basic meaning from semantic prosody is a controversial one (certainly within Sinclair's framework it would be completely implausible), my very tentative hypothesis here is that any separation of this kind may in part be the result of a visual impression created by the syntagmatic solitariness of the node within the KWIC facility, with basic meaning belonging to the node, and prosody supplied by the co-text.

6.2.5   Implication (v): The Eye of the Beholder, or Things Visible and Invisible

This implication concerns the idea that the structure of the concordance, which 'exposes', which renders visible word and environment, can equally expose and render visible semantic prosody. Such is the strength of the association between semantic prosody and the empirical world of corpus linguistics (see 5.1), that at times semantic prosody itself is apparently considered to be an empirical phenomenon which is perfectly amenable to direct observation. It was noted in Chapter 3 that some of the metaphors in the literature delineate semantic prosody in visual terms, e.g., as a type of "colouring", "hue" or "shade", or as a "halo", and as "barely visible to the naked eye". Moreover, as reported in 5.1, according to some authors semantic prosody can be 'observed' by analysing corpus data or be 'revealed' by corpus data. Other scholars write that it can be 'shown', 'manifested' and even 'exhibited' or 'displayed' (perhaps in part because the

KWIC facility is often referred to as a 'display') through corpus searches, all of which imply that semantic prosody is plain for all to 'see', as if it were in a glass case, just as long as one has access to corpus data. Yet the notion that semantic prosody is so transparently exhibited or manifested by corpus data collides with comments by Sinclair, who is often at pains to underline (e.g., 1998:20, 22, 2004:174) that the ways in which a prosody is expressed are extremely varied, with virtually no restrictions on its formal realisation, thus "making it difficult for a human or computer to find it reliably" (1998:20).

Many descriptions of semantic prosody are based on the premise that it is visible, but this is already to approach meaning from a debatable angle. Strictly speaking meaning is understood, construed, grasped, followed, acquired, absorbed etc., or conversely misunderstood, misconstrued, beyond us etc. The overriding emphasis on the visible seems to be a consequence of the indissoluble link between semantic prosody and the concordance, because concordance analysis requires the intervention of the eyes rather than that of the other senses.

This is not to suggest that generally speaking the appropriation of meaning is never considered in visual terms—language abounds with visual metaphors, and English has many expressions such as 'I see your meaning/point' / 'Do you see what I mean?' as well as the 'reading' of a text in the sense of the interpretation of a text. Nevertheless the visual dimension is salient in discussions of semantic prosody. I have already quoted Partington's (2004a:131–132) remark to the effect that semantic prosody is similar to connotative meaning but "much less evident to the naked eye", where the visual metaphor is powerful. Now it could simply be that this is just one more metaphor among many in descriptions of semantic prosody, with a playful allusion to Sinclair's corpus investigations into the expression *naked eye*, and should not be construed too literally. Yet perhaps we should be wary of over-prioritising the visual, because strictly speaking we should not expect to 'see' meaning at all, any more than we should expect, say, to hear it. The very idea that the eye is privileged rather than the ear may imply that it is *only* by looking at something—rather than hearing something, which in everyday communicative interaction is, one imagines, the most usual channel for detecting meanings—that we are able to understand a prosody. The impression is that semantic prosody, like little children, should be seen but not heard.

An obvious objection to this argument is that for language analysts it is a matter of necessity to prioritise the eye rather than the ear. As Teubert (2007:59) reminds us:

> The discipline of linguistics presupposes written or otherwise recorded language, language archived in whatever form, language that is available for analysis. Spoken language, language that already fades in the instant of its production cannot be subjected to analysis. Even when we investigate speech, we have to rely on recordings and transcripts.

The emphasis on written texts in linguistics is undeniable, whether they started life as written or spoken texts, and corpora epitomise this reality. Nevertheless, one cannot help feeling that in the present context the 'naked eye'—essentially the eye unassisted by corpus data—is subliminally being opposed to the 'eye' of the corpus analyst who, with the aid of corpus searches that render visible what was previously shrouded in the darkness of thought, is now able to 'see' unhindered. Cf. Stubbs (2001b) who, having stated (see 5.1) that discourse prosody is not observable (449), then argues (450) that "Conventionally encoded evaluative meanings are not observable in isolated instances, but only in repeated co-occurrences of lexis across large corpora".

   Stubbs is right to point out that co-selection patterns can help us infer semantic features, but the latent assumption is that certain types of meaning, though essentially invisible, are granted visibility by the corpus. The assumption is a risky one, however, especially within the framework of something as elusive as evaluative meaning. We might compromise by stating that "as corpus linguists we can identify the starting-point of what is visible of meaning: the words in texts" (Mahlberg 2005:147). However, Hunston (2004:159) includes the rider that even with the help of corpus investigations "the reliable identification and quantification of evaluative meanings remains essentially problematic", while Partington (2004b:17) underlines that "Evaluative meaning is all-pervasive in human communication, it is interwoven in the very fabric of texts and just how much of it is accessible to corpus technology is a vital experimental question". Indeed it is, and such comments might be applied not only to evaluative meaning, but to meaning in general.

6.3   A CORPUS CAN PROVE ANYTHING AND ITS OPPOSITE

Over fifteen years ago Svartvik (1992:10) warned us that in corpus use the "greatest risk of all . . . is the distance that may arise between the end user of a standard corpus and the primary textual material". Svartvik's warning was in part a reference to the analysis of spoken corpora, where transcriptions of spoken language may fail to render the speaker's meaning and intentions, but it could just as well be applied to any corpus analysis which tries to extract meaning from the data. And this seems to me one of the drawbacks of analyses of semantic prosody: the transition from strings of words to meaning, a transition which often involves a highly subjective or at least not entirely straightforward interpretation of the data. As Bernardini and Aston (2002:293) underline: "Data from corpora, if appropriately selected, can be used to support just about any claim, which is why descriptive analyses must strive towards total accountability of the data used". If this accountability is not achieved, then "a corpus can prove anything and its opposite" (Tognini-Bonelli 2004:23).

As an example of this let us consider an analysis conducted on semantic prosody where vastly different conclusions could be drawn from the same set of data. Cotterill (2001) examines "the semantic prosodies of some of the words and phrases used to describe domestic violence at trial, a key issue in the O.J. Simpson double homicide case" (291). The data used are the 100,000-word opening arguments for the prosecution and the defence. One of the aspects examined by the author is the theme of control, which (297) "recurs repeatedly in the prosecution opening argument, the word *control* occurring on no fewer than 66 occasions". Some textual occurrences from the data are reproduced, mostly of *CONTROL* as noun, with one or two of *CONTROL* as verb. Cotterill then provides a total of 15 concordance lines containing *CONTROL* preceded by *TO*, and notes (ibid.:298) that

> evidence from the corpus suggests that the kinds of people who typically control tend to consist of authority figures, often representatives of official bodies of some kind, for example the police, the army or the government [. . .] If we now turn our attention to what or who is typically controlled, it becomes clear that the majority of objects of control are generally held to be things that represent a danger or a negative influence of some kind.

This danger or negative influence is then broken down into semantic sets: warfare/weaponry, economic problems, medical problems (e.g., outbreak of cholera, spread of disease). Thus we have something like:

- 'authorities CONTROL dangerous situation'

From this Cotterill concludes (299): "In conceptualising Simpson as a controller of his wife, the prosecution presents Simpson's behaviour as entirely unjustified or unreasonable, and constructs Simpson as a man excessively obsessed with discipline and authority".

Whether the prosecution was projecting Simpson as a control freak or not, the "corpus evidence" presented by Cotterill requires closer examination. Firstly, it is not explained why it is the verb which is reproduced in the concordance and not the noun, since in the parts of the prosecution's argument reproduced by the author it is the substantive use which is the more frequent. Secondly, the concordance supplied regards only *TO CONTROL*—always as a verb, even if the sequence is interrupted, e.g., *to simultaneously control*, and apparently excluding any other form of the verb such as the base form without *to*, the third person singular etc. (A similar move is made earlier in the article, where the author reproduces a passage in which the past tense verb-form *encountered* occurs three times. It is then claimed, on the basis of corpus data, that *ENCOUNTER* "carries a negative semantic prosody" (296), yet the corpus search

is apparently limited to the base form *ENCOUNTER* alone.) Thirdly, only 15 of the 66 occurrences of *CONTROL* are produced as evidence for the author's hypothesis concerning Simpson's behaviour, so we are not advised as to how representative these are (a not uncommon problem in corpus studies, i.e., 'sample concordances' are sometimes supplied without explanations as to how they have been sampled and thus as to how representative they might be), and in any case it is not clear whether the total of 66 occurrences are of *TO CONTROL* or of other forms of the verb/noun.

Aside from these uncertainties, the conclusion drawn from the concordance supplied seems dubious. Cotterill interprets the data as suggesting that *CONTROL* is associated with a figure of authority trying to run the show in some way, yet *CONTROL* also co-occurs with dangerous situations, diseases etc., which one might well be justified in attempting to control. Thus we could just as easily posit—from the corpus data—that 'control' is both justifiable and laudable, because it endeavours to keep in check unpleasant things or scenarios. Ergo, Simpson's controlling behaviour was understandable because his wife was in some way dangerous, as dangerous as a weapon or a disease. But of course this conclusion would be the complete opposite of the one Cotterill appears to support. Clearly what I am saying here is not to be construed in any way as a comment on the legal case in question—it is simply a comment on the multifarious ways we can interpret the data we extract from a corpus. As Baker (2006:18) underlines:

> because corpus data does not interpret itself, it is up to the researcher to make sense of the patterns of language which are found within a corpus, postulating reasons for their existence or looking for further evidence to support hypotheses.

What is clear is that we need to give data their due, and deal with them as objectively as possible. Corpus linguistics is potentially a giant step forward for the discipline of linguistics because it has finally given us something concrete, i.e., language patterns, to examine under the microscope. Yet within the framework of semantic prosody, unless we agree upon consistent procedures with which to evaluate the data then there is not much of the empirical at all. Phenomena such as semantic sets, collocates, and by consequence semantic prosody itself, will remain all things to all men, and the concordance will be no more than a hall of mirrors, or worse the magic mirror in the Harry Potter books, able to show its users whatever they wish to see.

6.4   SUMMARY

I have argued in this chapter that the arranging of textual data in the form of concordances may significantly affect our reading of such data, to the

extent that we may perceive features, such as syntagmatic and paradig-
matic cohesion, which in reality are absent. The typical presentation of the
concordance may also be responsible for the fact that so many studies on
semantic prosody (i) have privileged the word rather than the unit of mean-
ing, and (ii) give the impression that semantic prosody is amenable to direct
observation. It is argued that, in part as a consequence of the above, the
inferring of semantic prosody from corpus data is a mercurial, complex and
very subjective process.

7 Intuition, Introspection and Corpus Data

Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished

7.0 INTRODUCTION

In the present chapter my intention is to examine the role and status of intuition and introspection as presented in studies on semantic prosody, and then to examine their role and status in specific corpus searches. By so doing I hope to point out a discrepancy between the perceived importance and the actual importance of intuition and introspection in corpus studies in general. I shall begin by considering the notion of intuition.

7.1 INTUITION: KEEPING BAD COMPANY

In very general terms it does not seem too hazardous to state that the ability or attribute we call 'intuition' is a positive, favourable one. The Shorter OED entry for this term includes 'immediate apprehension of the mind without the intervention of reasoning; direct or immediate insight', which sounds like a desirable outcome. In the BNC (Table 7.1) the lexical environment of 'intuition/intuitions' seems to be mostly neutral, perhaps leaning towards the favourable rather than the unfavourable.

The reader might be surprised, therefore, by a further concordance for *INTUITION* in Table 7.2.

It will be noticed that in this concordance *INTUITION* occurs in the company of, amongst others, *unreliable*, *wrong*, *stranglehold*, *not reliable and accurate*, *chancy and unreliable*, *fail to pick up*, *unreliable guide*, *even poorer guide*, *degraded*, *notoriously thin*, *not always accurate* and *outright lies*. This is a fairly disreputable bunch, from which we may wish to conclude that despite the favourable basic meaning of *INTUITION*, it is to be assigned a thoroughly unfavourable prosody. Therefore, on the basis of the data supplied by this second concordance, *INTUITION* might be classified as another of those words like *ALLEVIATE* and company (4.4.1), which have a positive basic meaning but mix with bad company.

Table 7.1   BNC Concordance to 'intuition/intuitions' (Random 30/547)

 1. meticulously noted, she argues, empathy and *intuitio*n can be invaluable in interpreting it
 2. explicit in a written assessment so that *intuition*s can be further refined on the basis of
 3. the designer draws upon a knowingness, an *intuitio*n either subconscious or superconscious
 4. a level of commitment and a willingness to act on *intuitio*n which today's businesses need
 5. happiness is only possible if you follow your feeling, your *intuition*, your real desires
 6. remembered that his other, earlier, *intuition*s about heteracy pulled in the opposite direction
 7. There is, to put it crudely, a firm *intuitio*n that the self we can identify with our immediate
 8. who are disinclined to appeal to *intuitio*n sometimes adopt an attitudinist view of ethical
 9. Surely Poulantzas is simply relying on the *intuition*s of social theorists, assuming that they
10. experimental painter, dictated less by logic than by *intuition*, and pursuing a development
11. is for teacher initiative, knowledge and *intuitio*n once the scheme is in operation.
12. describe certain dilemmas, impulses, *intuitions*, or decisions as moral ones is notoriously
13. foot in foot the bill—: there is a strong *intuitio*n of meaningfulness; for others, like cran—,
14. where knowledge depended so much on *intuition*, and also about how much he earned
15. those whom Gladstone's political *intuitio*n told him were the natural leaders of the nation
16. there is no doubt that our prevailing *intuition*s about ourselves as agents, and a number of
17. gulping down his own potent brew of *intuitio*n and prejudice mixed with available
18. may be carried out on the basis of (i) *intuitio*n techniques and product and interpretation
19. love and sympathy with strong practical *intuitio*n and the north London motto she chose
20. The answer is to elicit not *intuitions* OF meaning, but intuitions ABOUT meaning, which,
21. speakers of the language) have positive *intuition*s concerning which items belong together
22. systems he was pre-eminent, through *intuition*, experience and dogged persistence
23. film would have led him there even if *intuitio*n had not, for the next picture on it was
24. accused Rune of lying, some deep *intuitio*n told her that he had spoken nothing but the
25. members, they cannot have reliable prior *intuition*s as to the social meanings conveyed
26. There is no reason to think that their *intuition*s about /a/ are necessarily better than those
27. to managers, they have to rely on *intuition*, judgement by analogy and the informed
28. episode had nothing to do with Puddephat's death, her *intuitio*n had not led her astray.
29. Roosevelt only confirmed his realist's *intuitio*n that, beneath its idealistic rhetoric, the
30. teaching a subject where your insights and *intuition*s as a native speaker are positively

The 'corpus' from which the concordance in Table 7.2 is drawn comprises quotations regarding intuition from a number of different authors who have written about semantic prosody and corpus linguistics. The work in which these quotations are gathered is the book you are reading. If this collection is in any way representative, then in books on semantic prosody and corpus linguistics, the word *INTUITION* would appear to be associated with an unfavourable prosody.

How can we account for this in prosodic terms? We could take a diachronic view, postulating that *INTUITION*, basically a good word, has fallen into the bad company supplied by the domain-specific area of works on semantic prosody, and that the said bad company has attached itself to a victim who was vulnerable enough to be contaminated by its evil influence and who has acquired a bad halo of meaning as a result. Alternatively we could adopt a less controversial line of thought within a more synchronic

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Table 7.2   Concordance to 'intuition/intuitions' (Non-random selection)

 1. prosody) may in any case be based on unreliable *intuitions*". This apparent synonymy is
 2. native speakers have no reliable and accurate *intuitions* about them", and later in the
 3. *intuitions* about frequency and likelihood of co-occurrence are notoriously thin and not always accurate".
 4. chancy and unreliable business of linguistic *intuitions* and based in systematic
 5. "polarity is not usually accessible to *intuition*", and later asks the question
 6. studies have shown that a speaker's *intuition* is usually an unreliable guide
 7. of collocation and that *intuition* is an even poorer guide to semantic prosody".
 8. prosodies are less accessible through *intuition* than most other phenomena to
 9. "the inevitable failures of human *intuition*" and (ibid:2.1) "the demonstrably
10. it is that their *intuitions* almost always simplify the picture or tell outright lies
11. or at least not immediately, accessible to *intuition*". Remarks concerning
12. "native speaker *intuitions* are not a reliable source of evidence", while Channell
13. However, corpus analysis shows that this *intuition* is wrong. Whether this is
14. demonstrably degraded nature of human *intuition*". According to Adolphs and
15. reveal evaluative functions "which *intuitions* fail to pick up". Xiao and McEnery
16. instance, talks of the "stranglehold of *intuition*", while Hoey (2005:133) writes
17. if not impossible, to determine on the basis of *intuition* alone". Finally,

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framework: that *INTUITION* may well as a rule be a paragon of probity but that in studies on semantic prosody it is associated with an unfavourable local prosody (see Section 1.2.1).

Whichever of these two paths one wishes to follow, it is clear that intuition is not portrayed in a particularly favourable light in research on semantic prosody, and perhaps in corpus linguistics as a whole. Sinclair (1991:7), for instance, talks of the "stranglehold of intuition", while Hoey (2005:133) writes that "if there is one thing a corpus linguist quickly learns it is that their intuitions almost always simplify the picture or tell outright lies". The reason for this is perhaps that, when all is said and done, intuition is considered unable to withstand the competition from corpus data. What chance does the unwieldy, unbound Pandora's box of instinctive, intuitive feelings have when confronted with the observable, tangible domain of empirical data, with the fearful power and symmetry of a concordance?

It must be by virtue of this contrast that in discussions of semantic prosody, and indeed of corpus studies in general, intuition comes across as something to be eschewed. Fox (1998:25) urges corpus researchers to "start afresh, where possible laying aside their intuitions and looking at what the data tells them", almost as if intuitions were an umbrella to be hung on a hat stand when not required. It could, however, be objected that this is a travesty of justice: that intuition is in reality the nerve-centre of corpus linguistics, since so many aspects and criteria of corpus work feed off our intuitive reactions.

7.2   INTUITION AND INTROSPECTION IN STUDIES ON SEMANTIC PROSODY

It is worth citing some examples of how, in studies on semantic prosody, the reader is warned repeatedly, indeed almost automatically, of both the untrustworthiness and inaccessibility of intuition(s) (the singular and plural forms are used almost interchangeably in the literature) and introspection by comparison with the allegedly less precarious business of direct observation of corpus data. The fact that so many authors make reference to this issue suggests that it is central to the concept, perhaps even to the very existence, of semantic prosody. Let us begin with intuition.

Stubbs (1995:24) takes the view that "attested data are required in collocational studies, since native speaker intuitions are not a reliable source of evidence", while Channell (1999:39) aims to demonstrate that "analysis of evaluation can be removed from the chancy and unreliable business of linguistic intuitions and based in systematic observation of naturally occurring data", since corpus-based analyses can reveal evaluative functions "which intuitions fail to pick up". Xiao and McEnery (2006:103) begin their study of semantic prosody in English and Chinese with the following premise:

> We knew that our approach should be corpus-based as previous studies have shown that a speaker's intuition is usually an unreliable guide to patterns of collocation and that intuition is an even poorer guide to semantic prosody.

Louw (2005: Section 1.1) writes of "the inevitable failures of human intuition" and (ibid.:2.1) "the demonstrably degraded nature of human intuition". According to Adolphs and Carter (2002:7), "semantic prosodies are difficult, if not impossible, to determine on the basis of intuition alone".[1] Finally, Widdowson (2000:6), though his remarks concern language behaviour in general rather than semantic prosody, writes: "The quantitative analysis of text by computer reveals facts about actual language behaviour which are not, or at least not immediately, accessible to intuition".

Remarks concerning introspection, or at least introspection alone, are also reasonably common. McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006:84) write: "It would appear, from the literature published on semantic prosody [. . .] that it is at least as inaccessible to a speaker's conscious introspection as collocation is". This links up with Hunston's (2002:142) observations that "the semantic prosody of a word is often not accessible from a speaker's conscious knowledge", and that (ibid.) "semantic prosody is not always part of a speaker's conscious knowledge of a language". See 2.2 for other comments along the same lines.

What is especially striking, however, is that intuition and introspection are often cited together, with no manifest distinction between the two. According to Louw (1993:173):

It may well turn out to be the case that semantic prosodies are less accessible through human intuition than most other phenomena to do with language [. . .] corpus linguistics reveals a greater and greater mismatch between the products of introspection about language and those of direct observation.

Bublitz (1996:8), reporting views of other scholars in the field, writes that semantic prosodies are "open to introspection in principle", but that "native speakers have no reliable and accurate intuitions about them", and later in the same article (ibid.:23) he affirms that

Of course, lexicographers have been aware for some time now that intuition and introspection as sources of dictionary description are somewhat of a mixed blessing, if that. In particular, intuitions about frequency and likelihood of co-occurrence are notoriously thin and not always accurate.

Channell states (ibid.:41) that "evaluative polarity is not usually accessible to intuition", and later asks the question (ibid.:55) "why are the evaluative polarities of many items not discernible from introspection?".

One has the impression from these observations that the notions of intuition(s) and introspection merge considerably (see 7.6. for further discussion), even though dictionary definitions of the two keep them apart. It was noted in 7.1 that in the Shorter OED, intuition is defined as an instinctive rather than an introspective phenomenon: 'Immediate apprehension of the mind without the intervention of reasoning; direct or immediate insight'. Introspection, on the other hand, is defined as 'Close inspection, intellectual examination, esp. of one's own mind; observation of one's own thoughts, feelings, or mental state'. This latter is no doubt what Sinclair (1997:29) intends when he affirms that "the main organising procedures for composing utterances are subliminal, and not available to conscious introspection", though of course the OED entry would suggest that the combination 'conscious introspection' is a tautology.

7.2.1   IMMEDIATE INSIGHT VS. INTELLECTUAL EXAMINATION

Before going any further it is worth investigating with examples the distinction between the two dictionary definitions reported earlier. The notion of immediate apprehension or insight, when applied to language, presumably means that competent speakers of English are instinctively aware of the fact, for example, that the words *photographer* and *photography* have the same basic form, i.e., that they are morphologically related. Or, in terms of evaluative function, it seems reasonable to assume that immediate

apprehension or insight would enable us to appreciate, without pausing for reflection, the fact that if someone describes a house as 'filthy', then this is likely to be a strongly, even aggressively negative criticism of the house in question. In these cases the insight is so immediate that the introspection stage seems practically superfluous.

Other examples are more complex. Take the stress patterns of verbal phrases consisting of 'verb + preposition(s)', such as *come in*, *fall through* (as in 'the plan fell through'), *carry on* ('continue') or *put up with*: does the phrase stress normally fall on the verb itself or on the preposition(s) which follow(s) it? Although, if asked, most native speakers of English would need time to introspect about this in order to come up with an answer (the term 'native speaker' is used advisedly, because competent non-native speakers of English, since they have had to learn the language, may be more clued up about such things), it is evident that they intuitively know where the stress normally falls because they have no difficulty in producing the correct pronunciation. In the same way, native speakers of British English would need some fairly earnest introspection to work out the varying stress patterns, on the one hand, of *Christmas tree, Christmas present* and *Christmas cake* (where the phrase stress normally falls on the first word, i.e., <u>Christmas</u> *tree*), and on the other, of *Christmas Day, Christmas cracker, Christmas pudding* (where the stress normally falls on the second word, i.e., *Christmas* <u>Day</u>). Having said that, they would again have no difficulty producing the appropriate stress when pronouncing these expressions, and would probably notice something odd if other speakers were not to respect such patterns.

To take a lexical example, it seems likely that the different lexico-grammatical environments of the apparently synonymous *nearly* and *almost* would create difficulty on an introspective level (e.g., 'nearly / almost as tall as her mother', but 'she will almost certainly fail' rather than 'she will nearly certainly fail'; 'their behaviour was almost aggressive' seems more natural than 'their behaviour was nearly aggressive'; 'it's almost as if they are trying to conceal their wealth' rather than 'it's nearly as if . . .'). Once again, however, native speakers intuitively adopt the appropriate usage.

The difference between our intuitive ability to produce and detect appropriate language patterns and our ability to introspect about them can extend to the most banal of language phenomena. Not long ago an Italian student asked me whether or not I pronounced the 't' in *often*. Although it seems safe to assume that I have always intuitively pronounced this word in an appropriate manner, my student's apparently innocuous question provoked some lengthy and rather desperate introspective rummaging on my part, and I'm still not sure I gave her an accurate answer.

My view is that the situation regarding semantic prosody has much in common with the examples discussed above. I would not dispute *a priori*

the idea that competent speakers of a language may experience a degree of difficulty in introspecting about semantic prosody, but surely the same goes for countless other aspects of language. This perhaps constitutes another reason why we should be wary of over-prioritising the supposedly concealed quality of semantic prosody (see Section 2.2), of overplaying the subliminal card. One has the impression that in the literature the "covert", "subliminal" nature of semantic prosody has direct links with our perceived difficulty in introspecting about it, but if this is the case we may be forced to acknowledge a presumably undesirable equivalence between the subliminal, mysterious nature of semantic prosody on the one hand, and the presence or absence of /t/ in *often* on the other. Further, if competent speakers can *intuitively* distinguish more appropriate from less appropriate usage—whether they can introspect about it or not—and if this usage includes semantic prosody, then, as will be discussed in the next section, it is misleading to argue that our intuitions about semantic prosody are "poor", "unreliable" or "inaccurate".

7.3   INTUITION: OUR 'FEEL' FOR LANGUAGE

According to the OED definition, intuition could be regarded as something like our instinctive, immediate 'feel' for language. As an example I shall take the combination *distinctly pleasant*, cited by Stubbs (2001a:106–107), though he does not use it to exemplify intuition as such. According to Stubbs this is a possible but unusual combination: "either neutral phrases (e.g., *distinctly different*) or disapproving phrases (e.g., *distinctly childish*, *distinctly odd*, *distinctly uncomfortable*) are more usual". If this is so (though the neutrality of *distinctly different* seems questionable), one would not expect very competent speakers of English to reproduce the combination *distinctly pleasant* unless they deliberately wished to deviate from orthodox usage. However, whether they wish to deviate or not, it is their intuitions about the English language which make them aware of more conventional combinations, and to what degree one might depart from these. This seems to be analogous to the *almost / nearly* question mentioned in the previous section: competent speakers of English may not be able to introspect successfully about the differences between the two, but their intuitions will make them think twice before producing an utterance such as 'it's nearly as if they are trying to conceal their wealth'.

It follows that if intuitions are interpreted in this way, then any suggestion that semantic prosodies are "beyond the reach" of our intuitions, or that intuitions are "thin", "unreliable" or "inaccurate", will be more difficult to uphold. Indeed if we did not possess intuitions about what words can mean and how they combine with other words, it is difficult to imagine not only how, for example, we could appreciate literature—which

would be the least of our problems—but how we could communicate at all. An observation made by Partington (2004a:132) is extremely important in this regard. Knowledge of co-occurrence

> is not necessarily either conscious or explicitly recollectable but remains part of our communicative competence. Competent speakers' knowledge of the item *set in*, then, includes the fact that it is not normally found in a favourable environment.

Compare Widdowson's (2000:6) observations along the same lines:

> There are frequencies of words, and regular patterns of collocational occurrence, which users are unaware of, though they must be part of their competence in a procedural sense since they would not otherwise be attested.

If someone makes the perhaps ironic comment 'Today Robert committed a great act of kindness', the instantiation of the irony relies precisely upon the fact that competent speakers / readers of English know intuitively that *commit* (in the sense of *do, perpetrate*), as Partington puts it, "is not normally found in a favourable environment". In other words, the negative associations of *commit*, *set in* and others are not beyond the reach of our intuition at all.

In the next section I shall examine the roles of introspection and intuition more closely, not only in terms of our reactions to specific usage, but also in terms of how semantic prosody is typically identified by means of corpus searches.

7.4   INTUITION AND INTROSPECTION IN CORPUS SEARCHES: SEMANTIC PROSODY IN JAMES JOYCE'S *THE DEAD*

The final pages of James Joyce's *The Dead*, the last story in the collection *Dubliners*, include an extraordinarily lyrical, mournful, allusive passage, heavy with symbolism. The passage reproduced below describes Gabriel, the main character of the story, sitting in a dark hotel room late at night after a party with family and friends in Dublin. While his wife sleeps, he reflects mournfully upon the past and the present, and more specifically upon the fact that many years before, his wife, as she has just revealed to him, had loved another man before she met Gabriel.

> *The air of the room chilled his shoulders.* He stretched himself cautiously along the sheets and lay down beside his wife. One by one they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into the other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age.

He thought of how she who lay beside him had locked in her heart for so many years that image of her lover's eyes when he had told her that he did not wish to live.

Generous tears filled Gabriel's eyes. He had never felt like that himself towards any woman, but he knew that such a feeling must be love. The tears gathered more thickly in his eyes and in the partial darkness he imagined he saw the form of a young man standing under a dripping tree. *Other forms were near.* His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling.

A few light taps upon the pane made him turn to the window. It had begun to snow again. He watched sleepily the flakes, silver and dark, falling obliquely against the lamplight. The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward.

I would like to focus upon the two italicised sentences in this extract in order to suggest that prosodies are not beyond the reach of our intuitions, even if it is not always possible to introspect about habitual lexical environment with any great precision.[2] I shall firstly suggest prosodies for the sentences in question with the aid of BNC concordances, paying particular attention to how my searches were formulated. I will then discuss the implications of my search methods with regard to intuition and introspection. The first sentence is "The air of the room chilled his shoulders".

At first glance the sentence is beguilingly simple: on a syntactic level it consists of the canonical SVO, and from a semantic point of view it seems equally uncomplicated: it is midwinter, it is late at night, and not surprisingly Gabriel, who is lost in thought and sitting immobile on the bed, begins to feel the cold. Yet it is a sentence which contributes to the lugubrious sense of foreboding which characterises the story as a whole.

In the sentence in question I originally envisaged that this sense of foreboding was in part a result of some of the habitual co-occurrences of *CHILL*, whether as noun or verb. However, since respective searches for the noun and the verb retrieved a lot of occurrences (705 as noun, 281 as verb), I immediately refined the search to make it more similar to the sentence under analysis: the verb *CHILL* followed by any one of the possessive adjectives *my / your / his / her / its / our / their* within a span of 5. This produced a more manageable selection of 46 occurrences, though it included cases of *her* as direct object of the verb rather than as possessive. Relatively few of the occurrences carry the physical meaning of 'make cold', for example:

- was bitterly cold. The air chilled his lungs. The ground was already

- Washing in from off the water *chilled* his face, freshened him. 'You're

The great majority appear to convey the idea of fear, for instance:

- he lack of warmth in the smile *chilled* her. 'I've given much

- The grim hostility in his eyes *chilled* her. 'OK, I'll explain. The

- With a sinking feeling that *chilled* her more than any explosion

- something in his tone that *chilled* her even more. It was the note

In many of these (see Table 7.3) the element of fear is made explicit by co-occurrences such as *blood* and *marrow* in particular, but is also suggested by elements such as *bone*, *heart*, *mind* and *soul*.

In consideration of these co-occurrences, the data may be considered to suggest that although 'the air of the room chilled his shoulders' is not obviously metaphorical, the common metaphorical use of *CHILL* remains in the background, giving rise to a prosody of fear or terror, or even death.

The second sentence selected for analysis, again italicised in the passage from Joyce, is "Other forms were near". I originally investigated this because I had the impression that despite the ostensibly plain, simple quality of the sentence, there was something sinister, almost threatening which intensified the deathly atmosphere of the passage in question and the story as a whole, yet I couldn't quite put my finger on what caused this impression. Initially I made a number of apparently fruitless searches, all of them variations upon

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Table 7.3   BNC Concordance to 'chill/chills/chilling/chilled' as Verb Followed by 'my / your / his / her / its / our / their' (Span of 5, Non-random Selection of 12/46)

1. in; his threat was enough to *chill*   her blood. 'Poor Paige.' It became
2. minister's mind and preferably *chill*   his blood. It is possible to
3. and saw something that *chilled*   his blood. Like some animated corpse
4. Over.' It took them unaware, *chilling*   their blood. The reply, a wierd
5. more correctly Rachel Mortimer, *chilled*   my soul to the marrow.)
6. so damned determined it *chilled*   her to the very marrow of her bones
7. rope, the garrotte—they don't *chill*   my heart. Poison, however, is a
8. Are you here? The thought *chilled*   his mind —'Are you a ghost?' He
9. the aggressive determination which *chilled*   her to the bone. 'Take care
10. like some succulent titbit which *chilled*   her to the bone. Moving on
11. doing that?' The cool threat *chilled*   her to the bone. She swallowed
12. around her like an icy fist, *chilling*   her to the bone. There had to be

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'other forms were near'. These were (SUBST means 'as a noun', the asterisk means 'followed by'):

- 'other forms'
- 'other form=SUBST'
- 'form=SUBST were'
- 'form=SUBST * be=VERB' (span 5)
- 'were near'
- 'form=SUBST * near' (span 5)
- 'were near.'
- 'be=VERB * near' (span 5)

This went on for some time until I hit upon the search '*be*=VERB * *near*.' (span 5), i.e., any form of *be* followed by *near* followed immediately by a full stop within a span of 5 words. This resulted in 74 hits, of which around 20 had a biblical quality and/or suggested death or doom (see Table 7.4).

It will be noticed that many of the grammatical subjects of *BE* refer to the end of something, for instance the end of someone's life, the end of the world, the end of time. Other left-hand co-occurrences include *death*, *storm*, *dangerous*, *hate*, *lurking*, *enemies*, *loses hope*. More generally there

Table 7.4   BNC Concordance to 'BE' in All Its Forms Followed by 'near'
            Followed Immediately by a Full Stop (Span 5, Non-random
            selection of 20/74)

1. everyday life for the Lord is always *near.* The parables of Jesus promise
2. gather now that the last days are *near.*' He looked directly at Morrsleib
3. plan is dead and the end may be *near.* 'We don't have a chance', said
4. coming of Christ the time of Christ is *near.* It means that it'll come sort
5. than you hate me. My own death is *near.* I shall leave this ship and go
6. an eagle loses hope then death is *near.*' Her voice faded as her body
7. brochure Proclaiming that the end is *near.* Black diplomats with stately
8. be found. Call upon him while he is *near.* Let the wicked forsake his way
9. in God's presence. Our salvation is *near.* As we wait for Christ to be
10. Messiah and that the end of the world is *near.* Federal agents bathed the cult
11. Messiah and that the end of the world is *near.* The cult has been barricaded in
12. and that to see if anyone was lurking *near.* 'Ambush – you know, surprise
13. the main post. The bombers were very *near.* A crash in the direction of the
14. too, knew that their last hour was *near.* Many of them were the scourings
15. ended up with a newspaper. The end was *near.* It came in March with the
16. new organs, Kelly realised her time was *near.* 'I was driving Kelly to
17. dangerous of all possible enemies, man, was *near.* After ten minutes on
18. the King that the Day of Judgement was *near.* It was only after the
19. who, at 70, knew that his end was *near.* Mr Gorbachev, you feel, is only
20. mad certainty that a day of reckoning was *near.* And underneath these

is a biblical quality to the occurrences listed, with references to *Christ*, *Jesus*, *salvation*, *the coming of Christ*, *let the wicked forsake*, *the Day of Reckoning*, *the Day of Judgement*, *impending doom*. However, such occurrences represent only around a third of the total, so that if one wished to suggest a prosody of doom or something similar, it would have to be acknowledged that the prosody is not especially strong. At the same time, such a prosody would connect powerfully with the doom-filled atmosphere not only of the final pages of *The Dead* but also with the atmosphere of the story as a whole.

The other BNC searches I carried out in order to investigate "other forms were near" produced quite different concordances. The presence of the full stop after *near*, for example, was crucial, since without it there was a high percentage of more banal occurrences such as ' . . . near the library', ' . . . near the school', or 'near' with a place name. Further, the 'sinister' cases tend to occur when *BE* is followed directly by *near*, i.e., when *near* is not qualified by, for example, *very*, *quite*, *reasonably*, *too* etc., since the presence of a qualifier again tends to produce more prosaic occurrences, such as:

- but most of the time, she's fairly near. EFFORTS REWARDED She will

- weeks by then you Yeah yeah. It's too near. So the thirtieth of September

There are exceptions to this, however, for instance:

- of everyday life for the Lord is always near. The parables of Jesus promise

7.4.1 Implications of the Searches Carried Out

I would like now to make a brief survey of the corpus searches conducted for each of the two sentences, or better a survey of my reasons for making the searches. In the first case—"The air of the room chilled his shoulders"—I had from the outset felt intuitively that this sentence suggested fear as well as cold. Introspecting about this, I surmised that this could be due to the use of *CHILL* in expressions such as 'it chilled her blood' (as well as related expressions such as 'spine-chilling'), and I then searched the corpus for confirmation. I had not initially considered that the presence of a possessive adjective could be quite so critical, but since my initial searches did not seem to be sufficiently specific, I inserted the possessives. Thus from the beginning I had a fairly clear idea of what I was looking for, and promptly found it.

The case of "Other forms were near" is rather more complex. It had seemed to me that, despite the apparent lexicogrammatical simplicity of this line there was once again something disarming about it. The line came across as slightly archaic, but also as sinister and threatening. However, I was not initially sure why this was so. I reflected upon various possibilities, including

the use of *near* rather than something like *nearby* or *close by*; the fact that *near* was sentence-final; the combination *other forms*; or perhaps it was simply the knock-on effect of the broader co-text, which is in any case permeated with suggestions of death, whether direct or indirect (e.g., "One by one they were all becoming shades . . . fade and wither dismally with age . . . the vast hosts of the dead . . . their wayward and flickering existence"). Not being entirely sure about how to interrogate the corpus, I made quite a number of searches which for my purposes proved relatively fruitless. I had all but given up when I chanced upon the search outlined in Table 7.4.

What are the implications of these searches in terms of intuition and introspection? Certainly introspection played an important role. All the searches I made in the corpus were, in a sense, the results of acts of introspection. Yet the searches would never have been made in the first place without some sort of intuitive feeling that something was 'afoot', i.e., intuition preceded introspection. And of course the feeling that something was afoot was conditioned significantly by the fact that the broader co-text of the passage examined, and indeed of *The Dead* in its entirety, is peppered with allusions to the imminence and inevitability of death (something which links up with the notion which is central to Louw's (2000) Contextual Prosodic Theory—that situational and linguistic contexts are co-extensive; see 1.1.8). Readers of *The Dead* pick up on these allusions because they have access to the whole text as Joyce wrote it, and not simply to the single lines or fragments privileged by corpus analysis. To take this to its logical extreme, one could even dismiss my corpus searches as redundant, because anyone reading the whole of *The Dead*, rather than just an excerpt, would be sensitive in any case to the implications of impending death which pervade and haunt the entire story.

Be that as it may, it is important to bear in mind that corpus searches and findings do not just 'happen', they are not simply stumbled upon (see Whitsitt 2005:294–295). Upriver lie a person's thought processes about language, and these have significant bearing upon the searches conducted and therefore upon the results reached. This point will be discussed further in the next section, but for the moment suffice it to say that we should perhaps think twice before stigmatising intuition and introspection as inaccurate and unreliable by comparison with corpus data, since without them most corpus data would be destined to blush unseen. Indeed, if we take this argument a step further, there would be no corpus data at all, since all the contents of a corpus are the product of people's language intuitions. Corpora are usually described as collections of texts, but they might just as well be described as collections of intuitions. As McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006:80) point out, corpora "pool together the intuitions of a great number of speakers". And if it were not for our intuitions, the corpus-as-real-language argument would simply fall over, and corpora as we know them would not exist. As Whitsitt notes (2005:294), intuition "is the very thing that makes a corpus possible, for it is surely the collection of people's

intuitive use of language that makes it possible for a corpus to contain 'real' language".

7.5   STUMBLING UPON CORPUS FINDINGS?

In the previous section I made the claim that corpus searches and findings do not simply 'happen', in that they presuppose previous moments of intuition and introspection. These 'moments' influence not only (i) our decision to make corpus searches in the first place and (ii) the way we formulate our searches, but also (iii), once the search has been made and the concordance produced, how we select data that we consider to be relevant and how we eliminate data that we consider to be irrelevant. In short, these moments influence both what we are looking for and how we go about finding it.

In order to consider stages (i) and (ii) let us return momentarily to the phrasal verb *SET IN*, and think about how we might begin to identify any prosody or prosodies that this verb might be associated with. Let us begin by reflecting upon why it would occur to us at all to investigate the prosodic behaviour of this verb, and why we would wish to confine our search to its function as phrasal verb (stage (i)). Two main reasons suggest themselves: either we have a spontaneous hunch that *SET IN* as a phrasal verb might be worth investigating from this point of view, or we wish to check existing studies which claim that it is associated with an unfavourable prosody. Be that as it may, before we apply our fingers to the keyboard we may already have reasons to suppose that the phrasal verb *SET IN* is of interest from the point of view of semantic prosody.

The next stage (ii) is to come up with a search which will capture as many occurrences as possible of *SET IN* as a phrasal verb, and which as far as possible will *not* capture *other* occurrences of *SET IN*. The difficulty is that there is no straightforward way of setting about this task, because *SET IN* has so many different meanings. However, we have to start somewhere, so one could hypothesise an initial search for *SET* (in all its forms) followed immediately by *IN*, which produces 2,150 hits in the BNC. This does not get us very far, because we are confronted with a prodigious number of occurrences containing all sorts of meanings of *SET IN*, whether as a phrasal verb or not. Nevertheless, with this particular search we have already made an intuitive statement of our knowledge and expectations of language. Not only have we surmised that all the forms of *SET* will be necessary to investigations into *SET IN* as phrasal verb, we have also specified that *SET* should be followed *immediately* by *IN*. But why immediately? Why did we not opt for *SET* followed by *IN* within a span of 3 words, 4 words etc.? There are two answers to this question: the first is that the 'followed immediately by' option already retrieves well over 2,000 occurrences of *SET IN* in the BNC. If we allowed a span of say, 4 words, the number of hits would be formidable (5,563), and the search would risk becoming unwieldy. The second is that

it seems improbable that the span of 3–4 words would retrieve a significant number of further instances of *SET IN* as a phrasal verb, i.e., we intuitively acknowledge the improbability of, say, 'the decline is setting completely in' (even though something like 'the rot set right in' seems possible).

Corpus software is very sophisticated, allowing the user to make all manner of different searches, and any one search is only a single permutation among many. Thus it should be borne in mind that choosing a search means—at least momentarily—not choosing another, and that beginning with any given search means in a sense prioritising one search and relegating others.

In some respects this argument may be considered to be little more than nitpicking. One could easily object that although it is true that searches are not initiated by mental vacuums, and although it is true that some cognitive process must trigger the search, we nevertheless have to start somewhere—otherwise we would be forced to abandon corpus searches altogether—and anyway checking out hunches would seem to be a perfectly defensible procedure. One could further object that some searches do *not* have such a clear intuitive 'trigger', such as when language students are asked to use a corpus, with no previous 'lead' from the teacher, to investigate certain examples of usage.

These objections seem legitimate, but do not take away from the fact that in the first two stages previously described—the decision to make a search and the formulation of the search—both intuition and introspection play a crucial part. Moreover, intuition and introspection can be just as important for stage (iii)—the selecting of relevant occurrences and the filtering out of irrelevant occurrences from a concordance once a search has been made. As a more concrete illustration of the points raised concerning stage (iii), I shall now examine another verb often cited in studies on semantic prosody.

7.5.1   Selection and Rejection: COMMIT

Let us say we have reason to believe that the verb *COMMIT* is associated with a particular type of prosody. A BNC search for the lemma *COMMIT* produces 6,647 hits. The following comments refer to a sample of 100, which is reproduced in the appendix to this chapter (Table 7.5). Scanning the lines, we cannot really identify any sort of consistent patterns throughout the concordance because, like *SET IN*, *COMMIT* has a number of different meanings. The most frequent patterns are: the structure *be committed to (doing) something*; reflexive pronouns following the verb; *commit* as active or passive with a semantic preference for crimes and misdemeanours. Less frequent occurrences are: people or court cases can be committed for trial, and people can be committed to prison; you can commit someone to something; you can commit things such as money or resources to something, and you can commit pen to paper. Yet there is nothing sufficiently 'consistent' or recurrent at this stage to suggest a dominant prosody.

Reflecting upon this, we may decide that the meaning of *COMMIT* we are really interested in is the one corresponding to the sense of *perpetrate*. This decision may derive from personal preference / curiosity, or from the fact that semantic prosodists have focused more on *COMMIT* with this particular meaning than any other. But we are then confronted with the problem of how to extract *COMMIT* with the meaning of *perpetrate* from the total of 6,647 occurrences of *COMMIT* in the corpus. For reasons which I will explain shortly, let us analyse some possible trial-and-error moves primarily on the basis of *formal patterning* in order to filter out any meanings of *COMMIT* which do *not* correspond to that of *perpetrate*:

- eliminate all passive forms, in an attempt to remove any occurrences such as *we are committed to addressing this matter thoroughly* and *they were strongly committed to family care*. This, however, does not appear to work, since we would throw out the baby with the bath water—*COMMIT* in the sense of *perpetrate* is often used in the passive, e.g., *a trespass was committed* and *car thefts are not always committed by determined professionals.*
- eliminate all passive forms followed immediately by *to*. This would get rid of occurrences like *we are committed to addressing this matter thoroughly* and also *his own corrupt financial transactions and was committed to the Fleet prison*, but it has two major drawbacks: (i) it would NOT remove usage in the corpus such as *we are committed, every one of us, to* (*achieving*) *higher standards* and (ii) it might eliminate, for instance, any occurrences such as *no crimes were committed to my knowledge* or *the crime was committed to demonstrate . . .* (my examples—I use some invented examples in this section precisely because the user is required—in the first instance—to make inventive predictions about language in order to filter out unwanted / irrelevant occurrences).
- eliminate all passive forms followed by *to* within a span of say 5–6 words. This would have the advantage of eliminating *we are committed, every one of us, to (achieving) higher standards*, but of course it would fail to remove usage like *we are committed, each and every one of us in this branch and indeed in Smith's Bank as a whole, to (achieving) higher standards*. And once again it would eliminate *no crimes were committed to my knowledge* and *the crime was committed to demonstrate . . .* , as well as *all the crimes were committed last year, and to make matters worse . . .* (my examples).
- eliminate all passive forms of *COMMIT* followed by *to*, whether it is the word immediately after *COMMIT* or not. Bad idea: this would probably eliminate far too many passive forms of *COMMIT*, since with this criteria *to* could be anywhere in the BNC document in question, or better, anywhere after the passive forms of *COMMIT*.
- keep all passive forms whether followed by *to* or not, but eliminate all other occurrences of *COMMIT* not followed by a direct object. This

would have the advantage of preserving *committed or is about to commit a serious crime*, but it would also preserve innocuous-looking usage such as *I can with its aid commit my melodies to paper* or *genuine Christian love by committing the church to creating . . . .* Further, it would fail to eliminate any usage involving reflexive pronouns as direct objects such as *how far does she commit herself to Proteus . . .* , as well as usage such as *the significant sums already committed in areas like . . .*

- keep all passive forms whether followed by *to* or not; eliminate all occurrences of *COMMIT* not followed by a direct object unless the direct object in question happens to be a reflexive pronoun, since *COMMIT* followed by reflexive pronouns should also be eliminated. This would preserve *committed or is about to commit a serious crime* and eliminate *How far does she commit herself to Proteus*, but would still fail to remove *I can with its aid commit my melodies to paper* and *the significant sums already committed in areas like . . . .* In any case there is again the insidious problem of what 'followed by' actually means, since there are lots of direct objects in a corpus . . . .

The reader is no doubt beginning to weary of these tortuous permutations, and rightly so. This is the type of activity one would prefer to reserve for the computer, but even with a computer-assisted analysis, the idea that we can eliminate, using primarily formal criteria, all those meanings of *COMMIT* which do not correspond to *perpetrate* is no more than a chimera. Even if we take a simpler route, identifying that the sequences *COMMIT A* and in particular *COMMIT AN* (though not so much *COMMIT THE*) do seem to attract words indicating crimes, nonetheless (i) there are a good many exceptions to the rule in the corpus (*the anguish of having to commit a child to a mental hospital* and *For example, to commit an account of an incident to paper*), and (ii) we would still not have accounted for passive forms, large numbers of which, as noted earlier, also occur with 'crime words'.

As a final example, take *It is vital to have committed efficient representation in the City.* One could eliminate this occurrence by contending that *COMMIT* in the sense of *perpetrate* is unlikely to be preceded by a structure such as *it is vital*, but it seems considerably simpler to eliminate it by postulating that *COMMIT* in the sense of *perpetrate* is followed by words whose meaning is associated with crime and death.

The point I wish to make here is that adopting formal parameters in order to extract from a corpus occurrences of *COMMIT* in the sense of *perpetrate* is unspeakably complicated. As corpus users we are more likely to favour the far simpler strategy of relying first and foremost upon semantic criteria, and in particular upon our intuitions about the meanings of the typical co-occurrences of *COMMIT*. Of course we will need to avail ourselves of formal parameters too (and this is not to contest Sinclair's position

that as a rule changes of form go hand in hand with changes of meaning), but ultimately it is more realistic to assume that our process of extraction would entail the following steps:

- we predict from the outset that *COMMIT* in the sense of *perpetrate* will co-occur with words indicating seriously unpleasant things, or even, more specifically, with words such as *crime*, *murder*, *suicide*.
- we scan the concordance for words to do with crime or death, perhaps with the assistance of alphabetical sorting to the right, which is of course another introspective move. We then predict that in all those instances which do not include references to crime and death, *COMMIT* will not have the sense of *perpetrate*, so we de-select them.
- we now have a selection of *COMMIT* co-occurring with words indicating crime and death. In a handful of these it could happen that the meaning of *COMMIT* does not correspond to the sense of *perpetrate* ('they are committed to wiping out the human race', 'he even began talking of suicide, so I felt committed to helping him'— these are again my examples), but the evidence in favour of the *perpetrate* sense is overwhelming.
- we conclude that *COMMIT* in the sense of *perpetrate* has co-occurrences conveying the meaning of crime and death.
- conclusion: an unfavourable prosody can be inferred for *COMMIT* in the sense of *perpetrate*.

7.5.1.1 Implications of the COMMIT Searches

Aside from the conclusion, these moves describe a complete circle: we begin by surmising that *COMMIT* in the sense of *perpetrate* will co-occur with words such as *crime*, *murder*, *suicide*, we remove all those instances of *COMMIT* which do not co-occur with words of this description, and we end by asserting that *COMMIT* in the sense of *perpetrate* has co-occurrences conveying the meaning of crime and death. And then we infer the prosody. Also troubling is the fact that *perpetrate* itself co-occurs with words indicating crime and death (Partington (2003:231) notes that "*perpetrate* collocates with highly pernicious activities"), so the search was tendentious from the start.

The circle described in the preceding paragraph is particularly insidious in the context of semantic prosody. This is in part because, as noted in 2.2.1, in studies on the subject semantic prosody appears to be a magnet not only for words with common meanings such as *COMMIT*, but also for phrasal verbs such as *BREAK OUT*, *SET IN, SIT THROUGH, COME ABOUT, ANDARE INCONTRO*. The main obstacle in these cases is to extract from the corpus only those occurrences which are of interest for the investigation, but with phrasal verbs this may be a

mammoth task, since an awful lot of verb + preposition combinations may need to be sifted out, such as 'she broke out in goose pimples', 'the hotel is set in the mountains', 'they came about 7pm' (*SIT THROUGH*, on the other hand, is almost always a phrasal verb when the two words are immediately adjacent, though it may not be if they are separated: 'they just sat there looking through some old papers'). As previously suggested, the simplest way to carry out such filtering may well be based not on formal patternings but primarily on the semantic characteristics of the respective co-occurrences of the various meanings of these words. And once the filtering is completed and the final selection made, it is of course precisely these co-occurrences which will then be such an important factor in identifying any attendant prosodies.[3]

7.5.2   Stumbling upon Prosodies? Concluding Remarks

I have described three stages involved in trying to select relevant usage from a corpus for the purposes of identifying semantic prosody: the initiative of deciding to make a search, the formulation of the search, and the elimination of usage which is irrelevant to the investigation. A possible irony of the third stage is that having introspectively used co-occurrence criteria to sift out any usage irrelevant to the investigation, we then infer semantic prosodies from those very co-occurrences which we ourselves have prioritised for the purposes of the analysis.

My view is that both intuition and introspection are so crucial to each of these three stages that to argue that these are unreliable, inaccurate, thin, poor etc. is unfair, since without them no analysis of semantic prosody would ever get off the ground.

It could be contended that no search is innocent, that the moment we make a corpus search we almost unavoidably make an intuitive statement about language, or more specifically about our *expectations* of language, i.e., about what we expect to find. Intuition and introspection are so vital in this respect that they may remote-control our investigations, and thus dictate our findings, from beginning to end.

7.6   WHY IS INTUITION CONSIDERED AN UNRELIABLE WAY TO IDENTIFY SEMANTIC PROSODY?

Although intuition and introspection are clearly distinguished in the OED, the division between the two can be a fine one, since any transition from intuition to introspection may be instantaneous. There was perhaps no clear dividing line between, for example, my initial intuitions about "Other forms were near" —in the passage from Joyce—and the introspection which followed them, and in turn these were followed by further alternating moments of intuition and introspection as the corpus search proceeded.

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Thus from a practical point of view it may not be easy to separate the two. Having said that, a careful look at the quotations collected in Section 7.1 reveals that most scholars apparently take issue with intuition rather than introspection. In the light of my comments about the central role of intuition in investigations into semantic prosody, an obvious question at this stage is why scholars so often make a point of affirming that intuition is unreliable and, more specifically, that semantic prosodies cannot reliably be picked up by intuition. Three possible explanations come to mind:

(i) it may be that scholars refer in particular to cases where the prosody is 'buried' so deep that it is barely accessible to our intuition. For example it could be argued that the prosody ascribed to "Other forms were near."—if we accept that there is a prosody—is fairly subtle, because the element of destiny, impending death, appears to be represented in only a minority of the concordance lines examined.

The drawback of this argument is that almost all the examples of semantic prosody examined in the literature are judged to have *consistent* lexical profiles—as a rule consistently favourable or consistently unfavourable—and therefore would appear to represent more obvious (or, better, far less 'buried') cases than "Other forms were near.".

(ii) perhaps what is intended is that although we intuitively 'feel' something unusual is happening in a phrase such as 'Today Robert committed a great act of kindness', we may not 'feel' exactly what this is, and as a result our intuition is not entirely reliable. This would, however, be unremarkable, since once again the same could be said of thousands of other language phenomena. If we hear someone say 'his behaviour was nearly aggressive', we might again 'feel' the unusuality of it without however knowing exactly what that unusuality is.

(iii) it may be because in most studies on semantic prosody, and perhaps in corpus studies and linguistics as a whole, no clear-cut distinction is actually intended between intuition and introspection, with both interpreted as constituting moments of conscious, deliberate reflection upon the way language is used; this scenario, introduced in 7.2, seems to me the most likely.

Let us return momentarily to an observation made by Widdowson (2000:6) quoted earlier in this chapter, to the effect that "the quantitative analysis of text by computer reveals facts about actual language behaviour which are not, *or at least not immediately*, accessible to intuition" (my italics). If we take the dictionary definition of intuition cited earlier as valid, this statement comes across as contradictory because, if intuition is the result of 'direct or immediate insight', this would seem to preclude the delayed reaction envisaged by Widdowson. If, on the other hand, by intuition is actually intended introspection, the proviso 'at least not immediately' is a telling one, because it would allow that, given time, the human brain, though not possessing the speed and efficiency of computer software, *can* not only produce and be sensitive to but also predict

language patterns, among which co-selection patterns. It follows that if we can predict co-selection patterns, if we can introspect about them successfully, then we must also be able to predict and introspect successfully about semantic prosody, which, it has been claimed, is contingent upon those patterns.

Of course it remains possible, within this framework, that a difference of degree is intended between intuition as an instinctive, feel-it-in-the-bones moment of reflection, and introspection as a rather more earnest act of reasoning. However that may be, there is a frequent tendency to regard both as conscious processes.

With this in mind, I shall now focus upon this conscious act of reflection, for which, in accordance with the entries in the OED, I shall prefer the term introspection.

7.7   INTROSPECTION AND LANGUAGE USERS

If intuition too is intended as a deliberate act of reasoning, as synonymous with introspection, then what the cross-section of quotations reported in Section 7.2 really conveys is that, even after purposeful self-examination, we still cannot clearly identify prosodies. This interpretation would have certain advantages. Firstly, it would have the effect of dissociating semantic prosody from the stress pattern examples and from the different collocations and colligations of *nearly* and *always* discussed in Section 7.2.1, where it was hypothesised that self-examination *would* help to provide some insights. Secondly, if semantic prosody were not accessible, or at least not easily accessible, to introspection, then this would support its supposedly hidden, subliminal character. In other words, the barely perceptible quality so often assigned to semantic prosody could be considered contingent upon the supposition that introspecting about it is an arduous or insuperable task.

The downside of this argument is that—to my knowledge—no tangible evidence has been brought forward to demonstrate the difficulty of introspecting about semantic prosody. Indeed the idea that semantic prosody is scarcely accessible to introspection appears itself to be the result of an introspection,[4] and relates back to the question, raised in 2.2., that some meanings are more transparent than others. Channell (1999:44) distinguishes (introspectively) between lexis which has "obviously and intuitively accessible polarity" (her examples include *FAT* and *SELF-IMPORTANT*), and lexis where that polarity is "less obvious" (*REGIME* and *PAR FOR THE COURSE*). See also Hunston's (2001:21) similar distinction between lexical items with "immediately obvious" and "much less obvious" evaluative function. The distinction seems cogent, and may offer interesting avenues of research. However, the question which Channell (1999:55) asks (introspectively)

later in her article—"why are the evaluative polarities of many items not discernible from introspection?"—with its implied link to the more transparent / less transparent distinction, must surely be a question of a different order. We should be wary of making an automatic equation—especially in the absence of empirical findings—between meaning which is less obvious and meaning which is not identifiable through introspection.

I think most people would agree (introspectively) that the unpleasantness of, for example, *threaten* is more transparent than the unpleasantness of *set in* as a phrasal verb. This does not mean, however, that the unpleasantness of *set in* is inaccessible to introspection. If our introspection takes the form of the knee-jerk, time-honoured question 'What does the phrasal verb *set in* mean?' we may not arrive at a negative meaning of this verb, precisely because it is either not particularly transparent or not present at all (the latter would reflect the hypothesis that *set in* is a verb of neutral meaning which simply happens to keep bad company). But if we ask ourselves 'What kinds of things set in?', or, reacting to specific usage, 'How does 'their marriage set in' sound?', rather than simply 'What does *set in* mean?', it seems to me we are far more likely to gain insights into the unpleasantness of this verb. As pointed out by Munday (forthcoming):

> The potential for conscious manipulation of semantic prosody would seem to be rejected by some [. . .] This may be the case if an individual is asked to describe the prosody of a specific word, such as *cause*. But the fact that a violation of prosody (e.g. Louw's *symptomatic of . . . .*) can be identified by the reader who then interprets the irony of the choice, shows that as readers we are at least to some extent aware of a word's profile.

Indeed the very fact that *set in* as phrasal verb does appear to have such repeatedly undesirable grammatical subjects would if anything lend weight to the argument that the unpleasantness of this verb's habitual company is one its primary characteristics, and this is why 'their marriage set in' sounds unusual. In other words, even if the unpleasantness of this verb is for some reason not as transparent as the unpleasantness of *threaten*, its recurrent use in unpleasant environments, or better its co-occurrence with overwhelmingly bad company, *is* transparent to the extent that any deviation from its generally unpleasant subjects is salient.

This is why I stated earlier that a substantial part of the question of semantic prosody revolves around the dichotomy more transparent meaning / less transparent meaning. There is no denying that the unpleasantness of *threaten*, for reasons which have not yet been established, is more transparent than the unpleasantness of *set in*. But this

does not mean that the unpleasantness of *set in*, or its frequent co-occurrence with words of unfavourable meaning, cannot, upon reflection, be arrived at.

7.8 COGNITIVE REACTIONS

So far in this chapter I have tried to draw a distinction between intuition and introspection, notwithstanding the conceptual merging of these two notions in studies on semantic prosody. Indeed the impression from many studies is that any such distinction is irrelevant, because this conceptual merging derives from assumptions concerning a broader opposition—that of thought processes, or more specifically cognitive reactions, vs. corpus data. In other words, the spheres of intuition and introspection are tacitly collapsed into a single category which belongs to the sphere of thought, and it makes no difference whether we 'feel' something spontaneously or whether we work something out by means of (conscious) reflection.

According to this reasoning, it would be the language user's cognitive reactions to data which are contested, which are 'poor', 'unreliable' etc. Intriguingly, the reactions of the *analyst* are rarely called into question, yet as scholars and researchers I think we should be wary of falling into the trap of explicitly minimising the role of cognitive reactions in general and then relying upon them heavily during the course of our own investigations.

I have quoted Xiao and McEnery (2006:103) as saying that "a speaker's intuition is usually an unreliable guide to patterns of collocation and that intuition is an even poorer guide to semantic prosody", yet all the way through their article the authors systematically and unquestioningly make a three-way distinction between prosodies which are positive, negative and neutral, a distinction which is based squarely upon their cognitive reactions to "patterns of collocation". Similarly, Stubbs (1995:24) is of the opinion that "native speaker intuitions are not a reliable source of evidence", and yet, with reference to a concordance for *CAUSE*, has no hesitation, as a native speaker of English, in declaring that

> Nearly 80 per cent of occurrences have clearly negative collocates, usually within a span of 3:3. Conversely, a very small number of occurrences have positive collocates. The distribution is: negative 80%, neutral 18%, positive 2%.

Aside from the fact that distinguishing favourable and unfavourable co-occurrences is not as straightforward as it might seem (as claimed in Chapter 5), Stubbs has come up with percentages whose "source of evidence" is none other, it would seem, than his native-speaker reactions to the data.

Unreliable such reactions may be, but they remain able to generate some extremely precise statistics.

Note also in this regard the wording used by Channell (1999:44) when she distinguishes between lexis which has "obviously and intuitively accessible polarity" and lexis where that polarity is "less obvious". Here the sequence "obviously and intuitively" is striking, with its suggestion that cognitive reactions may be self-evident, something which contrasts dramatically with the author's previous misgivings about the "chancy and unreliable business of linguistic intuitions" (ibid.:39). Adolphs (2006) alludes frequently to the idea that semantic prosody is not intuitively apparent (e.g., 10, 56), and yet reports that some items (57) "carry a direct negative semantic prosody", which in the context would suggest that prosodies can be wholly apparent.

A final example of the unquestioned authority of the analyst's reactions to the data. With reference to Louw's (1993:159–164) analysis of a concordance for *UTTERLY*, Gavioli (2005:48) focuses on four lines—out of a total of 99—which appear to have favourable occurrences at R1:

- nfident, well-trained and *utterly* dedicated to the idea of win

- h how kind he was oh how *utterly* good and what trouble he too

- it up—"I think it's oh *utterly* grand of you to give us all

- t. Edward III, placid and *utterly* venerable, his face flowing

Gavioli remarks: "Reading the extended context of all these four examples, one can notice that they carry a fairly obvious ironic intention". The obviousness of the irony is however conditioned by the fact that in reality the reader does not have the possibility of "reading the extended context", or rather the extended co-text, because it is not supplied, either by Gavioli or Louw, though the latter gives a brief explanation of the contexts of the four utterances in question. It is not my intention here to support or dispute the notion of ironic authorial intention in these four instances, which would in any case require a broader knowledge of the relevant co-text and context. The point I wish to raise here is that in this case there is apparently a perceived need to comment upon the context and co-text *only* of those occurrences which, it would appear, flout the researcher's expectations or hypothesis.

This is a widespread phenomenon in corpus investigations. There is a tendency to examine expanded concordance lines for further co-text only when the (unexpanded) lines in question appear to contrast with the researcher's hypothesis, along the lines of, for instance: 'Lines 6 and 10 of the concordance would appear to be counter-examples of the hypothesis suggested here. However, once the lines in question are expanded we can observe that in reality this is not the case'. Yet in order to reach foolproof conclusions one would also need to expand all those

concordance lines which *do* appear to support the author's hypothesis, in order to make sure that the expanded texts do not 'in reality' contradict it.

Therefore, in order for the irony argument to be empirically sound, we would need to investigate the various contexts of the other 95 occurrences in the *UTTERLY* concordance in order to test the hypothesis that these, on the contrary, are not intended to be ironic. In other words, the observation that unusual co-occurrences like *utterly good*, *utterly grand* etc. carry ironic intention becomes meaningful only if we can also establish that the other 95 co-occurrences, which include combinations such as *utterly obsessed* and *utterly ridiculous*, do not carry ironic intention. Clearly if all the occurrences of *UTTERLY* in the concordance were judged to be ironic, then there would be no point in focusing on the irony of *utterly good*. So why—since the logic of the argument critically depends upon this—do the expected, the conventional co-occurrences not warrant further investigation, or even a passing reference? Could it not be for the simple reason that their conventionality is considered too cognitively obvious to mention?

The premise is thus that the conventional contexts of utterance of *UTTERLY*, or at least the great majority of them, are not ironic. Whether or not this is true, the question remains as to why the non-irony of the supposedly conventional uses should be considered self-evident. Perhaps, as suggested, our cognitive reactions are not as unreliable as has been made out. Yet one might also take this a step further and 'intuit' an insidious, unspoken contrast between on the one hand the supposed poverty of introspection of the non-analyst, and on the other the corpus analyst's ability to introspect about language, an ability which comes across as reliable enough not to require verification.

Finally, our personal reactions may prevail even when not supported by corpus data. Take, for example, the last sentence in the passage from Joyce in 7.4:

- The time had come for him to set out on his journey westward.

I remain convinced that the string 'the time had come' is unsettling and ominous here, perhaps in part on account of expressions such as 'she knew her time had come' and 'my time has come'—which to me suggest that someone's life is about to end—but also because it links up with the death-ridden implications of the "journey westward" (towards the setting sun) and of *The Dead* as a whole. I remain convinced of this despite the BNC concordance for *TIME HAD COME* (91 hits), in which—as far as I can make out—any such suggestions are all but absent, with the exception of the following line:

- I thought me time had come to be quite honest. I mean, how frightened were

The BNC data suggest that 'time had come' is associated with change, with personal resolve, with a new beginning, but not noticeably with death or destiny. (This seems to accord with Hoey's (2007) albeit much broader analysis of the string *TIME HAS COME* in his investigations of priming in Lewis Carroll's *The Walrus and the Carpenter.*) This discrepancy between personal reactions and corpus data has links with the passages cited at the beginning of this chapter, passages which supported the idea that intuition and introspection are unreliable by comparison with corpus data. Yet here one might just as well postulate the opposite—that corpus data are unreliable by comparison with intuition and introspection, because the latter have perceived something which corpus data have not picked up. In any case the supposition that personal reactions can always be checked against the information in a corpus is suspect. For example, O'Halloran and Coffin (2004:281), commenting on a claim by Fairclough (1995:113) that the action of 'flocking' is usually associated with sheep, ask: "But is Fairclough's intuition here correct? Is the verb *flock* usually associated with sheep? [. . .] By going to a large corpus of English, we can easily check this intuition".

O'Halloran and Coffin believe that intuitions are easily checked in a corpus, yet it cannot be excluded that users of English might associate *flock* as verb with sheep on a cognitive level even if co-occurrence in the corpus does not bear this out (see Widdowson 2000 for a discussion of Fairclough's comments). If, as has been reported in the literature, English speakers consider words such as *CAUSE* and *SET IN* to be semantically neutral, or at least without unfavourable associations, such an insight, rather than being poor, unreliable, inaccurate etc., would actually be invaluable within the framework of corpus investigations, precisely because it conveys something which the corpus data do not suggest. Teubert (2005:1) is of the opinion that "no introspection can claim credence without verification through real language data", but it seems just as tenable to claim the reverse—that no examination of real language data can claim credence without introspection (and of course there is no reason why 'cognitive data' should not be 'real' too). In short, the union of corpus findings and introspective reactions is a consummation devoutly to be wished, particularly with reference to semantic prosody, since, as stressed by Sinclair (1998:20, see also Section 6.2.5) it is so "difficult for a human or computer to find it reliably".

One senses that in corpus studies intuitive or introspective reactions are more tolerated, or are considered more valuable, in the interpretative stage once the corpus data have been retrieved and arranged for inspection, rather than in an earlier stage, perhaps before the corpus search has been carried out at all (see Stubbs 2007a:130). If this is true, it may create the undesirable impression that while the cognitive reactions of

language users in general should be treated with great circumspection, the reactions of the analyst are unassailable.

My view is, as I have tried to illustrate with my brief analysis of Joyce's *The Dead*, that intuition and introspection about language lie behind (i) the fact that we make corpus searches in the first place, and (ii) our arrangement, selection and interpretation of the data. Indeed there is a good case for arguing that without intuitive or introspective reactions we would not make any corpus searches in the first place, and that therefore from the very outset, even before we begin the search at all, they bear crucially upon our discoveries.

7.9 SUMMARY

Intuition and introspection, though frequently described in fairly uncomplimentary terms in studies on semantic prosody, are so central to such studies that one wonders how arguments in support of semantic prosody could stand up without them. In particular the following points have been stressed:

- it would appear that even the most banal of language phenomena may be just as accessible or inaccessible to intuition and introspection as semantic prosody
- intuition and introspection are not clearly distinguished in the literature, are often treated as synonymous, and/or are absorbed into an undifferentiated broader category of cognitive reactions
- no empirical data have been produced to support the notion that semantic prosody is inaccessible to our intuition and introspection
- the notion that semantic prosody is scarcely accessible to our intuition and introspection has close links with its supposed feature of subliminality, which in turn rests upon the idea that some meanings are more transparent than others
- any corpus searches we make, from beginning to end, owe such a huge debt to intuition and introspection that such searches may ultimately have little of the empirical at all
- prosodic meaning may be more clearly identified by 'trusting' the original text under observation rather than by scanning fragments from other texts
- many scholars who stress the unreliability of intuition and introspection freely call upon their own intuition and introspection when evaluating corpus data
- conflicting results obtained from personal reactions and corpus data respectively should ideally be used not to show up the deficiencies of one or the other, but should complement each other in the pursuit of more insightful findings.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 7

Table 7.5 BNC Concordance to 'commit/committing/commits/committed'
(Random Selection of 100/6,647, Alphabetical Sorting at R1)

1. OF THE OPINION THAT NO CRIME WAS	*COMMITTED*	
2. that they have been accusing our troops of	*committing*	'atrocities' in Palestine. No, I
3. by suing the co-contractor the creditor	*commits*	a breach of the contract with the
4. you of it. In the past a certain d'Urberville	*committed*	a crime in his carriage, and since
5. has witnessed, committed or is about to	*commit*	a serious crime. Other provisions
6. can be said to be at fault whenever he	*commits*	a tort. The fault of the plaintiff means
7. from the West entering the G.D.R. and	*committing*	acts of terrorism. "A most wise
8. the following 'facts': that the respondent had	*committed*	adultery; that the respondent
9. contingent, and only the British were fully	*committed*	alongside their American allies
10. in arresting a person suspected of having	*committed*	an arrestable offence is to be
11. grounds to suspect that each appellant had	*committed*	an offence by the time when
12. grounds to suspect each appellant of having	*committed*	an offence by the time the first
13. requires holding your nerve, being totally	*committed*	and believing absolutely that's
14. in uniform may arrest anybody found	*committing*	any of the offences under section
15. any of the relevant statutory provisions	*committed*	by a corporate body is proved to
16. WITH YOU Car thefts are not always	*committed*	by determined professionals, most
17. hierarchy and see serious crime being	*committed*	by the people who are respectable
18. of their owner; e.g., he would not	*commit*	conversion by making jam of strawberries
19. had been detained because they had	'*committed*	crimes' against Kuwaitis during the
20. with such data. Will people admit to having	*committed*	criminal offences, even if they
21. of Lucy's North Site. It is vital to have	*committed*	efficient representation in the City
22. extent of the client's liability for any breach it	*commits*:	for instance, by excluding
23. of evidence for the Crown, the case was	*committed*	for trial. Furthermore, despite the
24. they are tried in the magistrates' court or	*committed*	for trial in the Crown Court); and
25. Mortimer Twanley, 29, Liverpool, was	*committed*	for trial on three accusations of
26. Sword horror A MAN who threatened to	*commit*	harikiri with a 3ft sword after a row
27. and her youthful alertness. How far does she	*commit*	herself to Proteus, and does she
28. on the form of a racehorse, a trespass was	*committed*.	Hickman v Maisey [1900] 1 QB
29. plunged, his attempts to achieve security	*committing*	him to progressively more
30. for he is also a natural raconteur. When he	*commits*	himself to an assignment – be it
31. had already been for a pee), he reluctantly	*committed*	himself to an extended struggle
32. Seville. Despite the fact that he had not	*committed*	himself to the rising until the last
33. but that's how God has done it. He has	*committed*	himself to us. Well let's think for
35. breaches of the criminal law before they are	*committed*.	In general, such an injunction
36. got approximately eight hundred and fifty	*committed*	in terms of a hundred and eighty
37. hon. Friend is right. We regard murders	*committed*	in this country by terrorists as
38. private place. Note the offence cannot be	*committed*	inside a dwelling when the other
39. behind the commonsense image. In fact, so	*committed*	is RUC management to the
40. campaign, while UNITA would not	*commit*	itself to ending hostilities until its future
41. energy efficiency. The government has	*committed*	itself to reducing carbon dioxide
42. away with serious crimes, the powerless	*commit*	less serious offences and get prison.
43. are serious crimes. Thus, if women tend to	*commit*	more minor crimes, they will have

(continued)

Table 7.5   Continued

44. piano for the dulcimer . . . I can with its aid	*commit*	my melodies to paper, and that is
45. talented son who, right or wrong, I have	*committed*	myself to. It's just not going to
46. requirement, even though he may have	*committed*	no further offences, because of
47. even forgive him the talk about having her	*committed*,	now that that possibility was
48. at the time when those offences were	*committed*.	On that basis he submitted that,
49. at the price at which it is contractually	*committed*	or hedged, adjusted for unexpired
50. us in historical solidarity with them to	*commit*	ourselves to the continuing struggle
51. the risks: the fact that D has chosen to	*commit*	rape, robbery or another serious offence
52. Ken told a lot of stories about people who	*committed*	suicide—and constantly talked
53. even some of the Rep Men joined in. 'He	*committed*	suicide, 16 August 1977. Not a
54. be serious and deadly. Most people who	*commit*	suicide are depressed (Robins, 1981),
55. show that a very small minority of anorexics	*commit*	suicide, but at the same time Bruch
56. in England during the war, she literally	*committed*	suicide by refusing her food rations
57. Sally's story is a common one. 4 farmers	*commit*	suicide in Britain every week, making
58. Seeing his hippy mother and young sister	*commit*	suicide left him plagued by demons,
59. to the door. He said he thought he would	*commit*	suicide. The boy didn't go away. She
60. demonstrate genuine Christian love by	*committing*	the church to creating a more
61. However	*committed*	the cooperative movement was to
62. not only come down hard on offenders who\	*commit*	the crime of taking vehicles, but we
63. ('with intent to') and in the different verbs for	*committing*	the grievous bodily harm
64. but doesn't want to become emotionally	*committed*.	The group's publicity suggests
65. she's sorry that she's committed er she	*committed*	the offence. Er, and I don't think she
66. assault (as the case may be). The adult	*commits*	the offence; the law imposes on him
67. J had found, each salesman could quickly	*commit*	the whole of the sales information
68. Labour Front-Bench Members seem to have	*committed*	themselves to a single currency
69. by the year 2005. The countries have also	*committed*	themselves to (i) promoting
70. of big names. Sting and Peter Gabriel had	*committed*	themselves to the Amnesty world
71. it. He will only say: 'Toyota have not	*committed*	themselves to the Circuit of Ireland
72. informal talk because as soon as people	*commit*	themselves to writing they're gonna be
73. On world trade negotiations, the leaders	*committed*	themselves to 'making a full
74. argue that if Europe had already been	*committed*	to a common foreign and security
75. colonial minister, E.M.J.A. Sassen, was	*committed*	to a tough line. Van Mook was
76. possible change: older women intensely	*committed*	to a work calling, older men who
77. situation on behalf of the full board. We are	*committed*	to addressing this matter
78. the Greater London Council in 1981 was	*committed*	to an extensive programme of
79. where some gang members had been	*committed*	to Approved School after 'carrying'
80. And as often happens, United were so	*committed*	to attack, that they left the drawbridge
81. corporate officials are comparatively more	*committed*	to conventional values and a
82. to their own families, they were strongly	*committed*	to family care as the main form of
83. US banks to give them a stake in a country	*committed*	to free enterprise and profit,
84. of nationalisation under a government	*committed*	to free-marketism and opposed to
85. by President Carter (a Democrat nominally	*committed*	to peace) and taken to an even
86. document to the court as required may be	*committed*	to prison for a term not exceeding
87. corrupt financial transactions and was	*committed*	to the Fleet prison, from which he
88. consciousness. [My italics] Nizan was evidently	*committed*	to the idea of literature as a
89. doesn't see that as any excuse. He is firmly	*committed*	to the principle that Drama can
90. the land. Before long, the Earl was totally	*committed*	to the project and had agreed to

(continued)

Table 7.5   Continued

91. and the reporting entity is demonstrably	*committed*	to the sale or termination, then
92. vouchers is less whole-hearted, but those	*committed*	to system see it as a means of
93. year starting in April is £851 million. We are	*committed*	to the YT guarantee and we
94. the judges in calling to the Bar5. It is a power	*committed*	to them by the judges, a power
95. talked of a recent case in which a murder,	*committed*	twenty years before, became a
96. and the Royalist Falkland appears to have	*committed*	virtual suicide on the battlefield
97. battery. The general rule is that a battery is	*committed*	where a person touches or strikes
98. Offences Act 1967, this offence is not	*committed*	where the act is done in private,
99. given bail who are found guilty of offences	*committed*	while they were on bail is around
100. Party and State, and for the ideologically	*committed*	who had 'burnt their boats' with

8 Semantic Prosody and Lexical Priming

And once sent out, a word takes wing beyond recall.

8.0   INTRODUCTION

This brief chapter will try to position semantic prosody in relation to Hoey's theory of lexical priming (all the page numbers given in the current chapter will be from Hoey (2005) unless otherwise stated). As explained in the Introduction, I have so far withheld detailed comments on lexical priming, preferring to address it separately in consideration both of its importance as a theory and of the fact that its appearance was subsequent to almost all the various contributions on semantic prosody analysed in this book.

The methodology here will simply be to retrace the steps I have taken in Chapters 2 to 7, attempting to outline for each chapter the relevance of lexical priming for the various issues raised and for the theoretical status of semantic prosody itself. In Chapter 1 (1.1.10) a short summary was provided of lexical priming, to which the reader is referred.

8.1   IMPLICATIONS OF LEXICAL PRIMING FOR SEMANTIC PROSODY

In Chapter 2 I discussed the evaluative and the hidden qualities almost always attributed to semantic prosody. It was argued that not all the examples of prosodies supplied in the literature entail a representation of evaluation, and that it is not clear why they need necessarily be regarded as hidden. As regards the former argument, what is particularly relevant in Hoey's work is the notion that words and word sequences are primed for "pragmatic association" (pp.26–29): "Pragmatic association occurs when a word or word sequence is associated with a set of features that all serve the same or similar pragmatic functions (e.g., indicating vagueness, uncertainty)" (26). Hoey's examples of pragmatic association include: the property of 'vagueness' associated with the word *SIXTY* (26–27), which often co-occurs with expressions such as *about*, *around*, *almost*, *up to*, *getting on for*; 'acts of denial' associated with *REASON* (28); 'hypotheticality' and 'denial' associated with *A WORD AGAINST* (157); and the property

of appearing in statements rather than questions or instructions identified for *AGO* (177).

As Hoey points out (157), pragmatic association overlaps with Sinclair's description of semantic prosody. For example, the prosody of 'difficulty' that Sinclair associates with *NAKED EYE* might be considered to lie upon the same axis as the pragmatic association of 'vagueness' linked by Hoey to *SIXTY*. Yet although I claimed in Chapter 2 that an expression of attitude is not salient in the unit of meaning containing *NAKED EYE*, there is no question that the attitudinal feature is vital to just about all descriptions of semantic prosody, whereas it would seem to be less central to Hoey's pragmatic association. For Louw (1993) and many others, semantic prosody is indissolubly linked with the conveying, whether it be conscious or unconscious, of a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the utterance in question on the part of the speaker / writer. Louw was particularly interested in how unexpected word combinations (*utterly venerable*, *bent on sincerity*, *symptomatic of the University of Zimbabwe*) might convey (i) irony or (ii) meanings that the producer of the utterance would have preferred to suppress. However, the transition from unorthodox word combinations to expressions of attitude is problematic, mainly because the phenomena posited by Louw can by no means be claimed for all unusual combinations (see 2.1.1). Can the theory of lexical priming help us out here in explaining this type of creative usage, and the expression of attitude that might emanate from that usage? Hoey tells us that every word is primed to occur in association with particular semantic associations and with particular pragmatic functions (13), and these are the priming processes of most interest to us here. But he stresses that words are primed in all sorts of different ways, and when all these primings are consonant with each other, the result is 'priming prosody' (166):[1]

> Priming prosody occurs when the collocations, colligations, semantic associations, textual collocations, textual semantic associations and textual colligations of words chosen for a particular utterance harmonise with each other in such a way as to contribute to the construction and coherence of the utterance.

When priming prosody is flouted, the result is 'priming conflict' (170):

> just as priming prosody contributes to the apparent naturalness of an utterance, so a lack of prosody may contribute to the apparent unusualness of an utterance. One manifestation of a lack of priming prosody is priming conflict, which occurs when a choice of one priming is overwhelmed by another, more dominant priming. The result here is either ambiguity or humour.

Examples are supplied from newspapers of this ambiguity and/or humour, and these are followed by some considerations on literary creativity in Dickens,

Tennyson, and Dylan Thomas, and in particular on the way primings may be overridden (though even in the most creative of writing some primings have to be preserved, otherwise the result (177) "would not correspond to anything recognisable as an instance of language use"). The analysis of primings—preserved or overridden—in literary texts is taken up again in Hoey (2007), where the authors examined are Lewis Carroll, Michael Moorcock and Philip Larkin, and where the objective is (2007:27) "to account for how literary writers manage to say something new, for how they are creative as well as natural". This goal is certainly achieved, with reference to both literary and non-literary creativity, and Hoey's examples make fascinating reading, but I am not sure they provide a broad answer to the question posed earlier regarding the way unusual language may (or may not) convey expressions of attitude.

This is because primings may be overridden for all sorts of reasons which may not connect with evaluation or even with creativity. If a primary school teacher announces to his/her students that there are sixty seconds in a minute, and sixty minutes in an hour, it would seem excessive to construe this as a creative violation of the pragmatic association of vagueness posited for the word *sixty*. Yet what makes Hoey's notion of priming prosody so central is that it would suggest that in a given textual sequence there are all sorts of primings present, and that therefore it might be reductive to propose—as many studies on semantic prosody have done—an attitudinal quality on the basis of the flouting of a single semantic or pragmatic association. As I claimed in Chapter 7 during the analysis of Joyce's *The Dead*, prosodies may be instantiated over a much wider discourse.

Also important in this respect is the fact that "words are never primed *per se*; they are always primed for someone" (15). It is individuals who are primed on the basis of their encounters with language, and thus they are all primed differently. Corpora will reflect individuals' primings up to a point, or at least those which are likely to be shared by the majority of speakers, but the 'individuality' of priming means that accounting for personal attitude is more complicated, at least using corpus methods. This question will be taken up again later.

In Chapter 2 I also discussed the covert nature of prosodies, another attribute which seems to be common to almost all descriptions of semantic prosody, and which is often included as part of its definition. Hidden qualities of priming are not emphasised, though it is clear that users of a given language are unconscious of many of the phenomena associated with it, just as they are unconscious of so many other language phenomena (as discussed in 7.2.1). Hoey makes very occasional reference to hidden processes, e.g., to hidden colligational signalling (150), and to the uncovering of hidden patterns in corpora (2007:27), and many of these processes and patterns certainly surprise us, but the hidden attribute is not presented as central, perhaps because all words or word sequences have priming potential, and because some primings are more intuitively obvious than others. See also my comments on intuition towards the end of this chapter.

Chapter 3 addressed diachronic and synchronic questions which have been raised in connection with semantic prosody. Sinclair (2007:2) notes that the diachronic dimension is not central to lexical priming, though Hoey stresses that as words are acquired through encounters with them, they become "cumulatively loaded" (2005:8) with their contexts and co-texts (9):

> Every time we use a word, and every time we encounter it anew, the experience either reinforces the priming by confirming an existing association between the word and its co-texts and contexts, or it weakens the priming if the encounter introduces the word in an unfamiliar context or co-text or if we have chosen in our own use of it to override its current priming. It follows that the priming of a word or word sequence is liable to shift in the course of an individual's lifetime, and if it does so, and to the extent that it does so, the word or word sequence shifts slightly in meaning and/or function for that individual. This may be referred to as a drift in the priming.

The notion of drifting embraces diachronic considerations to an extent, but since priming is a descriptor for individual behaviour and is psychological in nature, the drifting described over an individual's lifetime is resistant to empirical investigation (though corpus data may afford insights into drifts among a community of users). Thus priming certainly involves the shifting of meaning over time, but unlike many studies on semantic prosody, it does not stress the transfer of meaning between words. The shifting is more readily describable in terms of the expectations of the language user, in particular (i) the adjustments consequent to the upsetting of those expectations, and (ii) the consolidations consequent to the substantiation of those expectations. Sinclair (2007:1–2) sums up the situation as follows: "For Hoey, each instance of a word, a structure, a pattern in use leads to all the participants in the event adjusting their expectations in the light of that shred of experience". This adjustment, Sinclair continues, "is a direct connection between experience and expectation, and as repeated instances crop up in further encounters, the adjustment is proportionate to the frequency of the events".

It was further noted in Chapter 3 that the great majority of prosodies identified in the literature are unfavourable in some way. Hoey, on the other hand, since priming is ubiquitous, does not focus on words or word sequences that are primed for unpleasant associations. This might suggest that all lexical items have prosodic potential, and that the customary weighting in favour of unpleasant prosodies is disproportionate, constituting more a reflection of human interests than of prosodic distribution.

In Chapter 4 I contended that some descriptions of semantic prosody take the word as their starting point, others take a longer sequence, and others again appear to embrace both. The theory of lexical priming is certainly constructed around the word, though priming also applies to longer

sequences built out of those words (8), and indeed the phrasing "words and word sequences" is often adopted during the course of the work (e.g., 13).

Hoey tackles this issue head-on in his chapter 8, when he compares his own work with Sinclair's model of the unit of meaning. It is underlined (158) that priming has a more textual dimension, with networks of primings informing considerably longer stretches of text than Sinclair had in mind. Hoey then writes (ibid.) that "while accepting the insights tied up in Sinclair's notion of the lexical item, I am less confident that the lexical item can replace the word as an analytical starting point". This is in part because (ibid.) there is "no obvious boundary to the posited notion of the 'lexical item'", and in part because "the notion of priming and the operation of nesting can account in a systematic way for the move from the word to the lexical item, and indeed, from the lexical item to the wider text". The passage from Joyce analysed in Chapter 7 exemplifies how we may need to look beyond the shorter stretches of discourse to which semantic prosody has normally been assigned.

The fact that priming favours the word as the departure point of analysis might initially provide some support for those descriptions for which semantic prosody characterises words rather than multi-word expressions. Yet Hoey illustrates that from its point of departure a word takes wing beyond recall, and that priming gains much of its strength from its ability to go beyond the phrase, sentence and textual chunk. It is my view that we can take these characteristics of priming and apply them, to a degree, to the various descriptions of semantic prosody. In other words, we could posit that all items, whether words or word sequences, have prosodic features which may combine with each other across stretches of discourse to produce functionally complete utterances. The pragmatic element which is so crucial to semantic prosody would thus be expressed over longer stretches of discourse than has previously been envisaged. Of course just how long those stretches of discourse might be remains an open question, which subsequent investigations in corpus linguistics will help to answer.

Chapters 5 and 6 dealt with the use, role and influence of corpus data. These were assisted by Hoey's discussion of collocation (3ff), and his point that semantic prosody is not a purely collocational phenomenon, inasmuch as it is contingent upon all co-occurrences and not only upon collocations (16–20). Further, Hoey finds too limiting the frequent ascribing of prosodies to favourable and unfavourable categories on the basis of co-occurrences which are similarly classified as good or bad. And indeed Hoey's notions of semantic and pragmatic association are generally much more nuanced, going well beyond these basic dichotomies. His examples of semantic association include not only semantic sets connecting with 'vehicles' or 'periods of time', but with a more subtle range of sets such as those evinced for *CONSEQUENCE*, i.e., (i) the underlying logic of the process described by *CONSEQUENCE*,

(ii) negative evaluation, (iii) the seriousness of the consequence, (iv) the unexpectedness of the consequence. He recognises, however, that the way we as analysts classify co-occurrences is relatively unscientific, with excessive reliance on single *ad hoc* reactions to the data, unsupported by the reactions of other language users.

Hoey does not comment upon the question of how the physical structure of the concordance might affect the analyst's interpretation of the data within it, but he includes some significant remarks concerning the status of the corpus as evidence of priming (14):

> it does not automatically follow that exploration of the nature of priming can be achieved through the study of computer corpora. A corpus, whether general—like the British National Corpus or the Bank of English—or specialised—such as the *Guardian* corpus used in this work—represents no one's experience of the language.

For Hoey, each person has mental concordances supplied by a personal corpus which is "by definition irretrievable, unstudiable and unique" (ibid.). As mentioned earlier, words and word sequences are primed for the user, but not *per se*, and it is this more individual, more psychological element which represents one of the major differences between the theory of priming and Sinclair's theory of the unit of meaning. Having said that, common ground is to be found in the fact that a computer corpus, although it cannot tell us the personal primings of any single language user, can indicate the type of data a language user might encounter in the course of being primed, and therefore may suggest that certain primings are liable to be shared by the community. Certainly the more personal characteristic of priming, and the fact that it is more contingent upon mental concordances than computer concordances, encourages us to reflect upon the supposedly inextricable association between semantic prosody and corpus data, and upon viewpoints which regard the user's mental and psychological reactions as at best ancillary and at worst to be blackballed.

This brings us on to Chapter 7, which was concerned with the role of intuition and introspection in work on semantic prosody and in corpus linguistics in general. Hoey (29–31) observes that different researchers may construe the same data in quite different ways, and that reactions to the data may in any case be distorted by the individual researcher's needs. As far as informants are concerned, Hoey warns that reactions to data may be distorted by the education of informants, "who may have endeavoured, quite possibly unsuccessfully, to modify their primings" (30). The latter is an important proviso which I did not take into account in Chapter 7, where I encourage the use and the reporting of informants' reactions to data, which could then be compared and contrasted with corpus data. Hoey makes the point that we should be wary of the introspections both of researchers and

informants. He also observes that pre-corpus dictionaries may constitute a good source of introspections about word meaning.

Hoey's work is thus of important assistance in assessing and in reconciling the ways in which semantic prosody has been approached over the years, and paves the way for a number of concluding observations, which will be presented in the final chapter.

9 Conclusions

Dressing old words new

9.0 SUMMING UP

This book has addressed a series of issues linked to semantic prosody and to the role and interpretation of corpus data in general. These are summarised, albeit simplistically, in the following paragraphs.

Although semantic prosody has been assigned certain features which would appear to be common to almost all accounts of it, it is nonetheless the case that the first two exponents of semantic prosody, Louw and Sinclair, described it in very different ways. Most subsequent contributions on the subject contain features of each of these descriptions, and some may be crudely divided into those influenced primarily by Louw, and those influenced primarily by Sinclair. It is normal that as a concept develops, it will be approached and discussed in several ways, but the impression is that single contributions do not give sufficient stress to the degree of difference between these main approaches. As a consequence, the appellation 'semantic prosody' has become something of an umbrella term whose breadth may deceive those anxious to find out more on the subject.

My feeling is, however, that most of the characteristics that have been attributed to semantic prosody, whichever of the two approaches is privileged, are questionable in some way. First of all I argued that not all the prosodies identified in the literature have evaluative function, and that they need not necessarily be hidden or be associated with semantically neutral items. By extension it was contended that all lexical items may have prosodic potential, even those with conspicuously attitudinal basic meaning. It was suggested that descriptions of prosodies in connotative terms are best avoided, though some overlap between semantic prosody and connotation seems inevitable (Chapter 2, as well as 4.5, on semantic prosody vs. connotation).

It was then pointed out that semantic prosody has been examined along both the diachronic and synchronic axes, and that very often both axes are included within a single account but are not sufficiently distinguished. Diachronic explanations tend to be couched in metaphorical terms which embrace the notion of good being gradually tainted by evil (Chapter 3).

Following on from this it was noted that semantic prosody is sometimes described as characterising primarily the word, and sometimes as characterising a longer sequence, though some accounts hover between the two. Both approaches, however, have certain drawbacks: in the former, which includes a diachronic emphasis, the notion of semantic contamination soon runs aground, while in the latter, there is the risk of stating the obvious when the basic meaning of the core item dominates the unit of meaning (Chapter 4).

In the following chapter I contended that the traditionally tight link between semantic prosody and corpus data is not entirely justified, and that the basic interpretative strategies adopted in order to infer prosodies from the data may differ markedly from one analyst to the next, in part because the concepts of collocation and semantic consistency have been construed in very broad terms (Chapter 5).

It was then claimed that the juxtaposing of lines of text within the concordance may result in analysts 'envisaging' untenable relationships of semantic proximity, and that from the structure of the concordance may derive a number of tenets put forward in studies on semantic prosody, for example that the word is the object of analysis, and that prosodies are 'shown' by corpus investigations (Chapter 6).

Finally, I promote the view that intuition and introspection, often presented as pariahs in corpus linguistics, are central to the identification of prosodies and should go hand in hand with corpus data (Chapter 7).

9.1 SEMANTIC PROSODY: CONCEPT OR CONCEPTS?

The question that arises at this point is whether semantic prosody can be preserved as a single concept, on the basis of features which are common to almost all descriptions of it, or whether it should ideally be broken down into less broad concepts. In order to consider this, let us remind ourselves of the various similarities and differences in the way semantic prosody has been described.

Common features:

- it is evaluative or attitudinal (and many scholars refer to connotational aspects)
- it is hidden
- it is contingent upon co-text, which is best revealed by computational methods

In view of the continuing importance and influence of the contributions by Sinclair and by Louw, the various other features of semantic prosody may be collapsed, again simplistically, into (i) those which stem primarily from Sinclair's work and influence, and (ii) those which stem primarily from Louw's work and influence:

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Elements prioritised by Sinclair's approach:

- it is central to the unit of meaning, one of the two obligatory elements
- it is considered within a synchronic framework
- it is a feature of a unit which is larger than the single word/expression
- it is not restricted to semantically 'neutral' lexical items
- it is not restricted to descriptions in terms of 'good' and 'bad'

Elements prioritised by Louw's approach:

- it is transferred or attached meaning
- it is considered within both a diachronic and synchronic framework
- it is a feature of the word
- it is associated above all with more semantically 'neutral' lexical items
- it is generally expressed by means of a binary distinction whose primary terms are 'good' and 'bad' (positive / negative, favourable / unfavourable)

Up until fairly recently semantic prosody had been treated as a single concept, but the latest contributions on the subject, notably Whitsitt (2005) and Hunston (2007), would suggest that this is implausible. Problems in this sense had already been signalled by Partington (2004a), while other scholars have tried to remove the ambivalence of semantic prosody by proposing terminological alterations. It was noted in Chapter 1 that Stubbs (2001a:66) switches from 'semantic prosody' to 'discourse prosody' "in order to maintain the relation to speakers and hearers, but also to emphasize their function in creating discourse coherence", a switch which perhaps indicates the wish to keep semantic prosody within the parameters established by Sinclair. More recently, Baker (2006:86–87) and Baker et al. (2006:144–145) have identified overlaps between 'discourse prosody', 'semantic prosody' (in Louw's terms) and 'semantic preference'. According to Hunston (2007:265–266), 'semantic prosody' is best restricted to Sinclair's interpretation of the term, while 'semantic preference' or 'attitudinal preference' could be adopted for "the frequent co-occurrence of a lexical item with items expressing a particular evaluative meaning" (ibid.:266), a definition reflecting Louw's approach.

Greater terminological clarity and consistency is clearly crucial to the preservation of semantic prosody as a theoretical concept / concepts, and one appreciates the laudable attempts to remove conceptual fuzziness. Although I am reluctant to muddy the waters further, my own view of this is as follows:

- the 'Sinclair interpretation' is perhaps best referred to as 'discourse prosody', in order to bring out the function in the discourse so strongly emphasised in his descriptions, while his 'semantic preference'

could remain as it is, though an important rider here is that certain prosodies suggested by Sinclair seem very akin to his category of semantic preference, for example the prosody of 'informal invitation' (1996a:92–93) he posits for *PLACE* as noun, or more specifically *MY PLACE*.

- for the 'Louw interpretation' I am not keen on either 'semantic preference' or 'attitudinal preference'—the terminology proposed by Hunston. The former comes across as inappropriate, firstly because as a term it seems to minimise the attitudinal quality so important to Louw and others, and secondly because Louw's (and others') interpretation of semantic prosody does not correspond to Sinclair's definition of 'semantic preference', in that, as noted in 5.2.1.2, Louw's semantic prosody derives from the favourableness or unfavourableness of an item's co-occurrences, and not from specific semantic sets. Thus the nomenclature proposed might prove to be misleading and therefore counterproductive. The latter ('attitudinal preference') seems closer to the mark, but may give the undesirable impression that the attitudinal feature applies to Louw but not to Sinclair. With this in mind, I would propose that to refer to Louw's interpretation we maintain his use of 'semantic prosody', if only because, aside from the fact that he was the first to use this nomenclature in published form, his reading of it seems to be the most widespread and thus perhaps merits the 'original' appellation.

Thus I would propose 'discourse prosody' to denote the 'Sinclair interpretation', and 'semantic prosody' to denote the 'Louw interpretation'. This solution is far from perfect. It might have been preferable, for instance, to do away with the term 'prosody' altogether, because (i) the prosodic element is based on a dubious analogy with phonology (3.3), and (ii) prosody has traditionally been associated with the rhythm of sounds in language, particularly poetry. Louw (1993:158–159) has expounded his reasons for adopting the term, but instinctively one would in the first instance expect it to refer to the meaning of sound patterns, or to the 'semantics of prosody' (it is perhaps significant that we often say that a sequence of words 'sounds right/wrong'). Interestingly, Gavioli (2005:46) makes an explicit connection between meaning and sound in the context of semantic prosody:

> The term 'prosody', which is generally used in linguistics to refer to the sound or rhythm of words, is applied here to the sound of meanings rather than phonemes and particularly to the way in which words and expressions create an aura of meaning capable of affecting words around them.

Gavioli establishes a connection between the sound of meanings and the creation of an aura, taking the view that the resulting aura may make a

given expression "sound better" in certain types of contexts rather than in others" (ibid.), and this certainly seems a topic worth pursuing.

9.2 WHITHER SEMANTIC PROSODY?

My view is therefore that semantic prosody[1] could profitably be split into two concepts, notwithstanding some overlap between the two. This does not take away from the fact that there remain a number of flashpoints in this domain which need attention and research if semantic prosody is to withstand the various criticisms of it both in this book and elsewhere. Below I list just a few among many possible avenues of research.

- As pointed out earlier, the contingency of semantic prosody upon co-text is an almost unanimously agreed characteristic, though as claimed in 4.4.1, the 'Louw interpretation' runs into difficulties when confronted with words such as *ALLEVIATE* and *HEAL*. Whether that co-text is primarily responsible for the meaning of the item in question, whether it combines with the item to create meaning across a broader unit, whether it is retrieved by corpus software or by the mind, it is co-text which, so to speak, allows the show to go on. In my view the greatest outstanding problem for semantic prosody is how we choose to examine that co-text, in terms of (i) its relationship to the node / core item, (ii) the co-textual chunk that we select for analysis, (iii) the methods we adopt to 'translate' that chunk into semantic preference, and (iv) the way in which we 'translate' that semantic preference into a prosody. In other words, in view of the multitude of imponderables that go with the territory, what is required is a more consistent and more rigorous interpretation of the sequence analysed, in order, as it were, to safeguard the lexicogrammatical environment. The categories proposed by Dilts and Newman (2006) for the identification of good and bad co-text could certainly be of use here, as could the *Appraisal* model, and indeed future insights in this area may lie in a fruitful blending of *Appraisal* resources and corpus data, for example in the manner of Coffin and O'Halloran (2006).
- Many accounts of semantic prosody concern the way unusual combinations of words can create intertextual 'resonance' and can suggest speaker/writer attitude. Yet what is under-researched here is not only why this might happen, but more to the point why very often it *does not* happen. It was surmised in Chapter 2 that there must be countless cases in language where one would expect an unorthodox combination to convey particular stylistic effects, but where such effects do not appear to be present—for example the BNC occurrences of *UTTERLY COMPELLING*, a combination which appears to violate the norm that *UTTERLY* enjoys bad company, or better will only keep good

company for reasons of irony, insincerity etc. or to achieve particular stylistic effects. And this must relate in some way to the more general question of creative juxtapositions in language, such as owls alongside pussy-cats in pea-green boats. Is Lear's poem interpretable in prosodic terms? Future research might suggest how theories of semantic prosody can be related more explicitly to speech act theory and to the illocutionary force of utterances (see Stubbs 2006).

- The overlapping features of connotation and semantic prosody certainly deserve more investigation than has been offered in this book, and the conundrum of whether all lexical items might not have prosodic potential, covert or overt, offers practically unlimited research opportunities.

- The diachronic dimension of many contributions on semantic prosody would certainly be worth pursuing, in order to test the hypotheses such as that postulated for *CAUSE*, i.e., that this word once had a neutral to good meaning and co-occurred with neutral to good company, but that over the decades / centuries its company has worsened and that this unfavourable promiscuity has led to a change in its meaning. Why and how meanings change over time can be difficult to pinpoint, but it would at least be a start if it could be unerringly established that the type of company *CAUSE* keeps has in fact altered over time.

- There is also plenty of research potential concerning the role of intuition and introspection in the identification of prosodies. Research of this nature could investigate reactions to specific examples of usage on the part of significant numbers of competent speakers of English. Collections of introspective data could be accumulated, and then compared and contrasted with collections of corpus data. This is important because up to now the only reactions supplied in studies on semantic prosody are those of the corpus analyst. It would also be interesting to compare the reactions of corpus analysts with people unconnected with corpus work. This line of research would also help to clarify how 'hidden' prosodies really are.

- The notion of words or sequences of words 'sounding right', alluded to in 9.1, potentially queries the prioritising of semantics and pragmatics in studies on collocation and co-occurrence in general, with consequent neglect of the implications of euphony. For example, the collocation *earth, wind and fire* is preferred to other possible combinations of the three lexical words in the phrase. One imagines that such collocations are influenced more by sound factors than semantic ones, and the same may be true for all sorts of word combinations (see Whitsitt 2005:296–298), something which would have obvious implications for work on semantic prosody. Further, since research has, on the basis of a posited close link between semantic prosody and corpus data, focused almost exclusively on the written word (whether

the utterance was originally written or whether it is transcribed spoken), there has been a consequent overlooking of intonation factors, which can be so crucial in identifying utterance meaning. It could be surmised, for example, that in speech the unfavourable meaning attributed to *SIT THROUGH* (6.2.2) would in large part be the outcome of an impatient / irritable / exasperated etc. intonation (the recent creation of corpora transcribed for intonation patterns will be of crucial importance in identifying the pragmatic implications of discourse intonation—see, for example, Cheng, Greaves and Warren 2005). This would tie in with my suggestion in Chapter 6 that semantic prosody, unlike little children, should ideally be seen *and* heard. And of course impatient gestures, tutting, eyebrows-raising etc. could also contribute to the instantiation of the prosody.

9.3 L'ABITO NON FA IL MONACO?

I have now reached the closing stages of what has certainly been a journey of experience, and my hope is, if nothing else, that I have encouraged discussion, and the dressing of old words new.

The reader may recall that in 3.4.1 I likened semantic prosody to a coat of many colours. Well, although this particular coat may be unwilling to budge, the time has come to slip it off and await some cognitive reactions to it.

I have been wearing it for several years now, so if I do manage to remove it:

- I could wash it, though I fear the colours might run
- I could beat the dust out of it, though such good and enduring company would merit less brutal methods
- I could store it my basement, though I shall never get rid of it.

Or I could take it to the cleaners, though others may do that for me.

Notes

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

1. Throughout this book capital letters are used to indicate the word / expression under observation. Unless otherwise indicated, what is represented is the word in all its inflected forms, i.e., in the present case *BREAK OUT* corresponds to *break out*, *breaks out*, *breaking out*, *broke out*, *broken out*. If necessary the relevant part of speech will also be indicated, i.e., noun, verb, adjective etc.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

1. http://www.grammatics.com/appraisal. Accessed 28.1.09.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. It has been argued that all corpus linguistics is essentially diachronic in nature, e.g., Stubbs (2007a:130–131) writes that "Corpus linguistics [. . .] is inherently diachronic: it studies what has frequently occurred in the past". This is an important point, since it stresses that corpora perforce represent not what *is*, but what *has been*. Indeed Teubert (2005:4) argues that all discourse has by necessity a diachronic dimension. In this chapter, however, diachrony refers to the widespread interpretation of diachronic linguistics, i.e., the evolution of language over time as a constantly changing medium and as a continuing series of language states.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. As far as I know this issue was first raised by Whitsitt in 2000 at the conference *Corpus Use and Learning to Translate (CULT) 2000: An International Workshop*, held at Bertinoro, Forlì, Italy, 3–4 November 2000, and the author subsequently alludes to it in Whitsitt 2005 (296–297). Brief references may also be found in Stewart (2003:244) and Partington (2004a:155).
2. One might wish to draw a distinction between the narrower context as a means to access phenomena such as co-occurrence and local grammar, and this wider context as a means to access phenomena such as schemata.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. In a later work (2005:23) Hoey provides a caveat to the effect that he had previously conflated the concepts of 'semantic preference' and 'semantic prosody'. In the 1997 work cited here, his use of 'semantic prosody' actually corresponds to 'semantic preference' or, as he terms it in his 2005 work, 'semantic association'. See also Section 1.1.10.

2. This is something I had not properly understood in Stewart (2003:242), where I give the impression that prosodies are to be inferred only from an item's "most frequent significant collocates". Note also the manifest terminological uneasiness of the expression adopted. Evidently I was unsure that an unqualified use of 'collocates' would ensure the attribute of frequency that I had in mind.

3. Perhaps this step is based on the idea that *foreigners*, *fans* etc. themselves have unfavourable semantic preferences and are thus associated with an unfavourable prosody, though this would carry the risk of infinite regression—consider, for example, the following observation by Dam-Jensen and Zethsen (2008:208): "The results of the analysis show that *CAUSE* almost without exceptions has a negative prosody. Examples of collocates include *death*, *damage*, *accident* and *pain*; that is, words with a very strong negative prosody". The authors do not supply profiles to support the unfavourable prosody they ascribe to *death* etc., but had they done so, they might then—if only for the sake of consistency—have had to check those profiles for further items which in turn might be associated with further prosodies.

4. Xiao and McEnery (2006:126), on the other hand, associate *change / changes*, and in particular *dramatic changes*, with a *favourable* prosody, since they label the phrase *caused dramatic changes*, used by a Chinese learner of English, as "inappropriate word choice arising from an ignorance of semantic prosody", i.e., the unfavourable prosody ascribed to *CAUSE* clashes with the favourable prosody ascribed to *dramatic changes*. The overall situation regarding the favourable / unfavourable qualities of *change / changes* is far from clear. See also Dilts and Newman (2006:236), and some comments by Sinclair reported in Section 5.3.2.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. My comments in this section are for the most part based on the reactions of the *analyst*, who will have electronic access to the corpus (s)he is analysing, but tables of concordances on the printed page can, as mentioned, prove particularly forbidding for the *reader*. Colleagues sometimes informally confess that for reasons of time they rarely examine in detail concordances reproduced in academic works, preferring to accept the author's conclusions about them as given.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. All this seems a long way from the view expressed by Mahlberg (2005:15), who writes that, subsequent to Fillmore's (1992) caricatures of the armchair linguist on the one hand, and the numbers-addicted corpus linguist on the other, "the extreme positions gave way to a more balanced view, and it now

seems widely accepted that corpora and intuition are not mutually exclusive but complement each other".

2. For a discussion of the translation into Italian of the sentences highlighted, and therefore of the question of translating prosodies, see Stewart 2009.

3. My argument here has not contemplated a halfway position, which is to select all instances of *COMMIT* followed by direct objects (if the corpus is parsed), to calculate the percentage of instances of direct objects which have as referents crime or death, and on the basis of this percentage to infer a partial semantic relationship. This could then be applied to the interpretation of passives. There would still be drawbacks even with this procedure, but it might facilitate a more 'formal' search.

4. In the literature on corpus linguistics, (apparent) introspections about introspection are not uncommon. Biber and Conrad (2004:42), for instance, write that

> one of the most widely-held intuitions about language use among English language teachers is the belief that the progressive aspect (as in 'He *is reading* a book') is the normal choice in conversation. As a result, traditional textbooks have often introduced the progressive in the very first chapter. However, corpus analysis shows that this intuition is wrong.

Whether this is a "widely-held intuition" or not (it is unfamiliar to me, though I have been teaching English for longer than I care to remember), the authors do not supply data concerning how the reactions were prompted, how many subjects were questioned, the time-scale involved etc., so it may be that on the basis of their teaching experience they have simply introspected about the introspections of others.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

1. It should be clarified that Hoey's concept of 'priming prosody' draws upon the phonological prosody analogy directly, rather than upon semantic prosody itself.

NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

1. In order to avoid confusion I shall continue to adopt 'semantic prosody' as a hypernym during the rest of this chapter.

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