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# Remarks on the Lexicographical Treatment of Metaforms

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the way dictionaries describe metaforms, items that refer to the linguistic system itself (e.g., pronouns and indexicals). The paper first shows the inconsistent grammatical classification of metaforms, which are usually and incorrectly categorized as adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, or interjections. It is then argued that metaforms should be classified in their currently known grammatical categories: discourse marker (*now*), focus particle (*even, like*), quotative (*like*), and so on. Discussion then turns to the definitions of metaforms, with illustration of their incorrect or misleading semantic characterization and suggestions for capturing their denotations consistently. This examination of the lexicography of metaforms is ultimately a case study in how dictionary making might be informed by judicious use of current grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic theory.

**Keywords:** ADVERB, COMPLEMENTIZER, CONJUNCTION, DEFINITION, DISCOURSE MARKER, EVEN, FOCUS PARTICLE, FORM CLASS, INDEXICALS, INTERJECTION, JUST, LEXICOGRAPHY, LIKE, METAFORMS, NOW, PART OF SPEECH, PREPOSITION, QUOTATIVE, THEN, USAGE

**Opsomming:** **Opmerkings oor die leksikografiese hantering van meta-vorme.** In hierdie artikel word die metode bespreek waarop woordeboeke metavorme beskryf, d.w.s. items wat na die taalsisteem self verwys (bv. voornaamwoorde en verwysingswoorde). Die artikel toon ten eerste die inkonsekwente grammatikale klassifikasie van metavorme aan, wat gewoonlik en verkeerdlik gekategoriseer word as bywoorde, voegwoorde, setsels en tussenwerpsels. Daar word dan geredeneer dat metavorme in hulle tans bekende grammatikale kategorieë geklassifiseer behoort te word: diskoersmerker (*now* "nou"), fokuspartikel (*even* "selfs", *like* "soos"), kwotatief (*like* "soos"), ensovoorts. Die definisie van metavorme, met illustrasie van hulle verkeerde en misleidende semantiese karakterisering, en voorstelle om hulle denotasies konsekwent vas te vang, word daarna bespreek. Hierdie studie van die leksikografie van metavorme is eintlik 'n gevallestudie van hoe die maak van woordeboeke beïnvloed sou kon word deur die oordeelkundige gebruik van die hedendaagse grammatikale, semantiese en pragmatiese teorie.

**Slutelwoorde:** ADVERBIUM, DEFINISIE, DISKOERSMERKER, EVEN, FOKUSPARTIKEL, GEBRUIK, JUST, KOMPLEMENTEERDER, KONJUNKSIE, KWOTATIEF, LEKSIKOGRAFIE, LIKE, METAVORME, NOW, SETSEL, THEN, TUSSENWERPSEL, VERWYSINGSWOORDE, WOORDSOORT, WOORDVORMKATEGORIE

## 1. Introduction

This paper explores the lexicographical treatment of forms that refer to the

informational system of language itself — either the formal linguistic code or the conditions of exchange in which the code operates. I refer to this class of reflexive forms broadly as **metaforms**.

This investigation has two main purposes:

- A. to show the need for careful form-class judgments of metaforms (and, by implication, forms in general) and the enhancement of these judgments by the use of current grammatical theory;
- B. to show the way consistent definitions can be constructed for terms that defy definition (or seem not to merit it, in some cases) if defining practice is informed by current semantic and pragmatic theory.

## 2. What are metaforms and do dictionaries include them?

Metaforms denote, all or in part, some aspect of the linguistic system or context of exchange. Typically included in the list of metaforms are indexicals, focus particles, evidentials, discourse markers, certain interjections, quotatives, meta-linguistic forms, and so on (see König 1991, Schiffrin 1987, and Lucy 1993 for illustrations). For example, an essential part of the meaning of indexicals is reference to properties of the system of exchange. *There* means 'some spatial position away from the source of speech,' and so crucially involves the linguistic and contextual system itself.

Indexicals are fairly obvious and uncontroversial metaforms, but there are many other items that are similarly reflexive, and not often understood as such: focus particles, for example. *Even* gets its meaning by signaling that the hearer must add information to that currently within the scope of the particle and consider that new information more important or stronger than any presupposed in the context (König 1991: 69ff.). *Even* is thus a metapragmatic signal to the hearer to examine both the proposition asserted and the context and then explicitly add information that exceeds that encompassed by the particle itself.

While metaforms are semantically productive and determinate, their lexicographical treatment has not followed suit, perhaps most significantly in their very inclusion in the dictionary. As long as the metaform dovetails with an established form-class or can be (erroneously, I will argue) forced into one, it is likely to be included. So no dictionary excludes *even* (adverb — wrongly categorized, I will argue) or *I* (pronoun). But few include the discourse-level metaphor *you know* (*I was, you know, surprised by that*).

Furthermore, form-class recognizability frequently interacts with usage judgments. Metaforms are sometimes excluded because they are incorrectly assigned to certain registers or varieties (e.g., *really* and *huh*), or attributed unsystematic or idiosyncratic distributions (e.g., *like*: see below).

We can see this conspiracy of uncertain grammatical class and usage judgments in the uneven lexicographical treatment of a long-debated form —

*like*. It has a notorious history in English lexicography, the most obvious illustration of which is its substitution for the ostensibly more refined *as*. The AHD (1992: 1042) puts this amusing history nicely:

Writers since Chaucer's time have used *like* as a conjunction, but 19th-century and 20th-century critics have been so vehement in their condemnations of this usage that a writer who uses the construction in formal style risks being accused of illiteracy or worse.

In modern American English, *like* has undergone a fairly established, but only recently noticed (and "horrifying," to purists), innovation to a metaform in certain meanings and distributions. *Like* now has two meta-uses: as a focus marker and as a quotative verb.

In the former, *like* is a free particle, indicating either attenuation (1a) or significantly new information (1b) (examples from Underhill 1988: 236):

- (1a) But it's like a five, ten minute hike to the cabin
- (b) She like paid for the whole thing ...

In (1a), *like* means 'something like,' and hedges the commitment of the speaker to the information that follows. In (1b), however, *like* means 'and here's the real new information or the point of this exchange, namely ...'; in this sense, *like* is a focus particle. Interestingly enough, these two meanings are closely related both conceptually and historically. But even more important, they are formally unifiable since they are both instances of focus (though Underhill 1988 reserves focus for only the latter usage).

In the latter use, as a marker of quotation, *like* has also drawn some attention (Romaine and Lange 1991: 227):

- (2) And she's like, "Um ... Well, that's cool."

In this function, *like* signals reported speech or thought (or even behavior: "So I was like: [gesture or behavioral demonstration]."). This *like* appears to be a grammatical innovation of an alternate for *say*, *express*, or even *do* (Cf. colloquial *go*: Butters 1980). It is thus a metaform, reflexively signaling the fact of speech, thought, or behavior.

Both uses of *like* are quite widespread. Underhill (1988) reports instances of focal *like* across social class, gender, and age. A literature professor is reported as saying about E.M. Forster: "Then, all of a sudden, he like stopped producing completely" (Underhill 1988: 238). Romaine and Lange (1991) observe a similarly wide distribution of quotative *like*. Although they find it more common among young females (like many grammatical changes), they also report written instances (e.g., from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*) and some usage in British English. Indeed, the *New York Times Magazine*

(May 5, 1996: 54) quotes Christine Whitman, the current Governor of the state of New Jersey, as follows: "I was like, 'Please don't let my Dad see me ...'"

The linguistic and social distributions of *like* as a metaform should recommend it for lexicographical treatment, but it has been picked up only sporadically. The AHD (1969, 1992) reports only the second focal use, calling it **nonstandard**. This is a curious usage label because the attenuating sense has a long history and is closer to standard. In fact, depending on how the form's semantic history is to be interpreted, it could be argued that the OED CD-ROM (1993) reports related uses and meanings back to the 13th century (Cf. the first sense in the OED CD-ROM (1993)). The BDNE (1973, 1990), which tracks new usage and hence should report these innovations, contains only the second focal use (again as nonstandard). Still, neither the AHD nor BDNE accurately classes or defines the term.

WNWCD (1996: 783) reports the focal use but gives no definition or grammatical class. The RHD (1971) reports only the first focal sense (1a) twice, defs. 18 and 20, apparently differentiating the two by register and syntactic distribution. Chambers (1983) excludes both focal and quotative altogether. The COD (1995: 789) reports the second focal sense (as 'so to speak'), but classes it as an adverb and slang. And if you look closely in the OED CD-ROM (1993), you find both focal senses well attested for over 1 000 years (*like* adv., B.7).

Quotative *like*, unfortunately, loses out completely. It rarely appears anywhere, as far as I can tell, not even in the BDNE. One exception is Spears' (1989) dictionary of American slang, which records both quotative and focal *like*. The appearance of these uses in a dictionary of slang is a striking illustration of the socio-political conditions on choice of entries (see Willinsky 1988 for some interesting discussion in this respect).

The lexicographical success and failures with *like* open a window on dictionary-making itself. Why is there such uneven treatment of metaforms?

### 3. The form class of metaforms

Part of the problem with metaforms is their grammar. Certainly the present variation and grammatical innovations of forms such as *like* make form-class judgments difficult. But when you look at how metaforms have been treated in dictionaries as a whole, a number of puzzles about their part of speech immediately surface, suggesting that they have never been properly classed and that such errors have been passed down out of lexicographical tradition.

Focus particles are almost uniformly classed as adverbs. The AHD (1992: 979), for instance, categorizes *just* this way, and Chambers (1983: 686), the COD (1995: 737), and the RHD (1971: 775) follow suit. The OED CD-ROM (1993) does likewise, and cites, as supporting evidence, *even*, which it also classes as an adverb, as do the other dictionaries.<sup>1</sup>

But there is little to recommend this construal of focus particles as

adverbs. Admittedly, some derive from adjectives, and the adjectival base of some adverbs is well known. *Just* and *even* fit this pattern, but this does not mean that they currently are adverbs. Many other focus particles have non-adjectival and non-adverbial sources, like numerals and verbs, and others are unquestionably nonadverbial in their current manifestation (such as the modal particles: König 1991: 163ff.)

In fact, the relevant counter-evidence to the construal of focus particles as adverbs can be found in the dictionaries' own constructed examples. The AHD (1992: 979) exemplifies the focal meaning of *just* ('merely') with *just a scratch*. The RHD (1971: 775) has a similar exemplification: *just a clerk* and *just one of those things*. The COD (1995: 737) illustrates the focal meaning 'no more than' with *just a minute*. These cannot possibly be adverbial uses, as the failure of the substitution of other adverbs attests:

- (3a) ?? happily a scratch
  - (b) ?? quickly a clerk
  - (c) ?? fast one of those things
  - (d) ?? excitedly a minute
- (Cf. ran happily, quickly, fast, excitedly)

While adverbs are known to have a fairly unrestricted cooccurrence, there are limitations (McCawley 1988: 192). But focus particles have **unrestricted categorical distribution** because their communicative purpose is to mark the status of **pieces** of propositions (or propositions as a whole) with respect to context. In this function, they behave like all scope-bearing items (adverbs included) and have their effects left to right. *Even* or *just* can thus modify a determiner (*I saw even THAT dog*) or a preposition (*Donna went just INTO the street, not ACROSS it*), and *like* can modify a whole sentence (*Like, Bob caught a fish*) or part of one (*Bob caught a, like, FISH*).

Similar conclusions hold for discourse markers, forms that signal speaker and hearer position with respect to the discourse context (*now, well, oh, and then*, e.g. Schiffrin 1987): *Now, I was going to say that ..., Well, I think I'll go, Oh, I was going to say that ..., So you're leaving, then?* Dictionaries usually class these as adverbs, conjunctions, or interjections. The AHD (1992: 1239) reports *now* in this use as an adverb. Chambers (1983: 866) has it as both an adverb and interjection. Curiously, the OED CD-ROM (1993) has it as an adverb, but it cites the very form that Chambers classes as an interjection (*now then*, which the OED CD-ROM (1993) traces back to the year 100 as an adverbial use). WNWCD (1996: 929) has it as both an adverb and interjection, and the COD (1995: 932) has it as only an adverb.

Similar alternate categorizations can be found for the other discourse markers. The COD (1995: 1445, 3c and d) classes two uses of discourse-level *then* as an adverb. But other dictionaries exclude these uses altogether. The RHD does not cite *then* in any of its discourse forms, nor does WNWCD. Per-

haps by this practice, the RHD and WNWCD mean to indicate that the discourse-marker sense is subsumed by, or is indistinct from, the adverbial or conjunctive sense and so not necessary to report. However, this would overlook the unique surface distribution of the discourse marker: *We decided on going, then ...*

Like focus particles, **discourse markers** must be differentiated from adverbs, conjunctions, or interjections (whatever this latter category might be!). They are, to put it baldly, discourse markers. Why not call them what they are?

Perhaps most confusing and hence (ironically) illustrative is again the case of *like*, which has not only a checkered history of inclusion but an equally checkered history of categorization, both in its "standard" uses and in its metaform innovations.

Almost without divergence, dictionaries list a standard use of *like* as a preposition, as in the following expressions (AHD 1992: 1042): *It's not like him to take offense, lived like royalty, looks like a bad year for farmers*. The RHD, WNWCD, and COD echo this classification, as do Romaine and Lange (1991: 244ff.) in their study of the quotative. But I have my doubts about this (as does the OED CD-ROM (1993), which, as far as I can determine, never classifies it as a preposition).

In all its ostensible prepositional uses, *like* fails the standard tests for constituency as the head of a prepositional phrase (PP). A PP can take a pro-form:

- (4) Bob sat *on the chair*, and Bill sat *there*, too

This holds even for apparent confluents of prepositions with conjunctions when prepositions take sentential objects:

- (5) Bill ran *after Bob shot the gun*, and Sam ran *then*, too

But no such substitution is possible for the *like*-phrases that supposedly exemplify prepositional uses:

- (6a) ?? They lived *like royalty*, and we lived *such*, too (AHD)  
 (b) ?? He works *like a beaver*, and she works *such*, too (RHD)  
 (c) ?? She acted *like an idiot*, and he acted *such*, too (COD)

Another test is movement. PP's allow object extraction and fronting for topicalization, sometimes leaving behind a resumptive pronoun. *Like*-phrases do not:

- (7a) He looks like a good prospect for the job (RHD)  
 (b) ?? A good prospect — he looks like it for the job.  
 (8a) He looked over the fence for his father  
 (b) The fence — he looked over it for his father

*Like* cannot be a preposition in these standard uses. It behaves much more like a **complementizer**, signaling a full or reduced clause. (Quirk et al. 1978: 727-28, 754-55 call it simply a **subordinator** and note its peculiar behavior, though they also give it prepositional uses (323).) But no dictionary I know of uses the category **complementizer**. Indeed, *that*, uncontroversially a complementizer, is called a **conjunction** in WNWCD (1996: 1386), COD (1995: 1444), and RHD (1971: 1470). But complementizers have quite restricted distributions because they mark certain types of clauses (McCawley 1988) while conjunctions link categories of **any type**. Note that the only possible pro-form for the *like*-phrases in (6) is *so* (9a), which is also an acceptable substitute for a noun clause marked by *that* (9b), but not acceptable as a pro-form for either a clause with a conjunction (9c) or a preposition (9d):

- (9a) They lived *like royalty*, and we lived *so*, too.
- (b) Tom believes *that Tom was here*, and Donna believes *so*, too,
- (c) ?? Tom cried *because Bob was here*, and Donna cried *so*, too.
- (d) ?? Bob sat *on the chair*, and Bill sat *so*, too.

These clear problems with the categorization of standard *like* make me worry about its classification in the focal and quotative — i.e., metaform — uses. The BDNE (1973: 260) classes focal *like* as a conjunction, citing a number of written instances. The OED CD-ROM (1993) does likewise, giving citations that reach back two centuries. The AHD (1969, 1992) calls the focal use an adverb; WNWCD (1996: 782) puts the focal use under the verbal use (*like to died*, which it astutely calls **intransitive**), but it is said to be syntactically empty even though it precedes words phrases and clauses. The COD (1995: 789) has focal *like* as an adverb.

But all these categorizations fail the standard constituency tests, and do so in the very illustrations the dictionaries use to exemplify them. A conjunction must conjoin grammatical objects of like category: *boys and girls*, not ?? *boys and with*. The BDNE cites the following as illustrative of conjunctive *like*: *And I thought like wow, this is for me*. While one might think that this exemplifies the conjunction of two clauses — *and I thought* + CONJ + *this is for me* — note that no other conjunction can appear in the CONJ slot: ?? *And I thought since wow / and wow / if wow, this is for me*. The OED CD-ROM's (1993) examples are equally misleading: *As we say pragmatically in Huddersfield: "C'est la vie, like!"* Here, nothing is "conjoined" by *like*; in any case, no conjunction appears in sentence-final position in English. *Like* is not a conjunction here, but a focus particle.

These examples underscore the kinds of form-class choices made by dictionaries and the way lexicographical tradition reproduces outdated and misleading grammatical theory. Perhaps the most radical lesson of the uneven grammatical treatment of metaforms is the suggestion that form-class judgments should be eliminated from dictionaries altogether. After all, users infrequently consult the dictionary for grammatical class anyway, so why not ter-

minate the practice and thus avoid mischaracterization? This would surely evoke protests from the public, who want to see grammar in the dictionary even if the public does not use the dictionary for such a purpose. It would also evoke protests from the publisher's marketing division, which wants the public to see exactly what the public wants to see (Willinsky 1988 has some revealing comments about the interaction of marketing and editorial decisions in dictionaries).

Still, if form-class categorizations are to be included in the dictionary, they should at least be accurate. Modern linguistics has added to the list of form-class categories, so why not class things as they are? At least four new parts of speech should be included in dictionaries as a consequence of an examination of the lexicographical treatment of metaforms: complementizer, discourse marker, focus particle, and quotative. There is no need to use the term **metaform**, which would be too inclusive and too abstruse to the user. The prefatory material in the dictionary could be easily emended to include these categories — without fancy abstract explanations but with clear illustrations. Some suggestions to this effect are in the last section of this paper.

#### 4. The definition of metaforms

Just as curious as the grammatical treatment of metaforms in dictionaries are their definitions. Sometimes metaforms are defined as if they uncontroversially denote, just like nouns, verbs, and prepositions. At other times, they are defined as if they defectively denote or, worse, are meaningless. These discrepancies can be found both within and across dictionaries, suggesting an uneven treatment of metaforms both in-house and across the profession as a whole.

There appear to be three strategies to define metaforms:

- A. define them in the regular defining formulas of the dictionary and so treat them like all other (normally) denoting items;
- B. define them via a usage or distribution statement, not a formulaic definition, and so call attention to them as a special class;
- C. avoid defining them or define them as **empty**.

The first strategy, normal form, typically applies only to those metaforms that are also easily (and wrongly, see above) put into traditional form-classes. Thus, the AHD (1992: 979) defines the focus particle (*n=née* adverb) *just* as "precisely; exactly ... barely ... merely ... simply ..." The OED CD-ROM (1993) does likewise, subdividing senses by distributions: "exactly, precisely ... used freely before a demonstrative ... as an emphatic expletive, strengthening an assertion ..." WNWCD (1996: 734) follows suit and elegantly captures, in a single definition ("neither more nor less than"), the way the particle focuses both sides of a gradient: 'no less than,' *just great*, and 'no more than,' *just five*.

Similar results emerge from an examination of the definitions of *even*, though again the WNWCD has the most semantically sophisticated treatment. WNWCD (1996: 470) initially defines *even* as "though it may seem improbable; moreover; indeed," and goes on to give clear variations of this essential meaning, all in a strikingly clear definitional vocabulary. From both a linguistic and lexicographical standpoint, this is an admirable characterization of *even* because it is semantically accurate in casting the form as a focus marker, and hence a comparative expression, yet it remains simple and faithful to the dictionary's entire denotational style. (This practice is one of the features that makes the WNWCD an excellent book.)

Discourse markers and other metaforms fare less well in terms of normal form and often evoke strategy #2. Chambers (1983: 866) defines the discourse marker *now* as "used ... in remonstrance ... or taking up a new point ... expressing admonition, warning ..." The AHD (1992: 1239) reports: "Used to indicate a change of subject or to preface a remark ..." The OED CD-ROM (1993) notes: "in sentences expressing a command or request, with the purely temporal sense effaced ... Used to introduce an important or noteworthy point ... Inserted parenthetically, or at the end of a clause, with similar force." Even the WNWCD cannot resist distributional statements, which it uses to precede both the excellent definition of *even* and discourse markers like *well* (1996: 1516): "an exclamation used to express ..."

While this defining style suggests an awareness of these forms as metaforms since they are defined by their conditions of use, the practice has two problematic consequences. First, despite (or because of?) the gesture to pragmatics, this sort of definition often obscures the meaning of the form. What does it mean to say that *now* means 'used in taking up a new point'? All points? Whose points? Only points? Why are the following disallowed?

- (10a) ?? Now, hello. (but Cf. Now, what's your name?)
- (b) ?? She said that, now, she wants to take up a new point, in remonstrance.

Second, this style unnecessarily brackets and calls attention to the meta-use. Indeed, in some dictionaries, metaforms are defined literally in bracketed form. WNWCD (1996: 470) begins the definition of *even* with "*used as an intensive or emphatic particle meaning*," with the usage statement italicized, presumably because all usage labels in WNWCD are in italics. But, in fact, this is a statement of the form-class, not of usage.

The RHD's (1971: 987) definition of *now* also illustrates the practice of bracketing: "(used to introduce a statement or question)."<sup>2</sup> The discourse marker *now* means, in fact, 'upcoming discourse focused on the speaker with the current moment of speech as an initiation point and so this is a break in the flow of information' (Schiffrin 1987: 228-46). This definition resolves both problems in a single sweep — it is in the spirit of normal definition and incor-

porates the meta-use into the definition proper. Furthermore, this definition can be constructed only with the help of current pragmatic and discourse theory.

Bringing the definitions of metaforms in line with existing defining formulas and removing all trace of special bracketing might improve definition in other ways. Consider the first two senses of the RHD definition of *I* (1971: 704):

-pron. 1. the nominative singular pronoun used by a speaker in referring to himself ... -n. 2. (used to denote the narrator of a literary work written in the first person singular.).

These senses seem unnecessarily confusing to me, mixing grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic facts and bracketing special literary uses. For one thing, *I* is classed as a pronoun elsewhere in the entry before the first definition, so why repeat this grammatical classification in the first sense? (And why change the classification to a noun in the second sense?) For another, the second sense is really a type of the first.

A simple definition for *I* could be given that solves all these problems in a single sense: 'speaker self-reference, whatever the ultimate source of the speech itself, say an author (*I*) writing the speech of a first person narrator (*I*) speaking it.' (See Levinson 1989: 68). Narrator self-reference is a type of recursive speaker self-reference, and both can be accommodated in a straightforward denotation, without mixing criteria and without bracketing metafunction. (Cf. WNWCD 1996: 666, which has a remarkably similar definition.)

The third defining strategy is to avoid definition or to call metaforms **meaningless**. Chambers (1983: 866) defines the metaform *now* as "used meaninglessly ..." (sic) and then goes on to characterize its meaningful uses! The OED CD-ROM (1993) is also guilty of empty definition for *now*: "used elliptically in various ways ..." This practice, quite obviously, is not much help, though it is really not much different in spirit, if not letter, from a distribution statement, which fails to pinpoint the meaning of the term and defers the definition to its collocation. Imagine defining *dog* as if it had no content: "used to identify, describe, or solicit certain animals."

It turns out that all three definitional options can be found in lexicographical treatments of focal *like*. In the BDNE's (1973: 260) initial treatment, *like* is defined in bracketed and empty fashion — "used without a definite meaning" — but then given a determinate characterization of its meaning — "to understate or de-emphasize the word or phrase that follows or precedes it." The later BDNE (1990: 289) defines it in normal fashion. The 1969 AHD brackets it as a pausal or emphatic and assigns it expletive usage (1969: 757); the later AHD (1992: 1042) eliminates the expletive characterization but keeps the same bracketing.<sup>3</sup> Even the WNWCD defines focal *like* as "used without meaning or syntactic function," but the same dictionary takes on equally non-standard metaforms and straightforwardly defines them: the discourse phrase *you know*

is defined as "you understand" (748).

These disparities both within and across dictionaries return us to our earlier lessons on form class. Why not treat metaforms as they are? Focal *like* denotes 'attenuated, intensified, or very new or very salient information.' The COD (1995: 789), in fact, captures the first part of this denotation by defining focal *like* as 'so to speak,' a definition also found in BDNE (1990: 289). If focal *even* can be defined simply, accurately, and consistently as a focus particle, why should other metaforms be given different treatment?

## 5. Conclusion

The foregoing arguments lead to two recommendations:

- A. Increase the number of part-of-speech labels to be more sensitive to the variety of grammatical categories in a language.
- B. Write definitions that define, even if they are to characterize discourse-level or pragmatic forms. Empty definitions — or defining an item as **meaningless** — can be misleading.

With respect to the first, dictionaries might include the following categories and descriptions in the prefatory material:

**Complementizer:** a form that precedes and signals only the presence of a clause. Unlike a coordinating conjunction (*and*) or subordinating conjunction (*because*), which may optionally mark clauses, a complementizer can signal the presence of a subject clause, and, when marking an object, can sometimes be deleted. Examples of complementizers are (*the fact*) *that*, *if*, and *whether*: *That John bought a new car surprised me* (subject); *I know that/if/whether/0 John bought a new car* (object and deletion). Cf. ?? *Since John bought a new car surprised me* and ?? *I know since/because/and John bought a new car*.

**Discourse Marker:** a form that indicates how the information is exchanged in a conversation or the speaker's or hearer's position in the exchange. Examples of discourse markers are *now*, *then*, *so*, and *well*: *Now, what were you going to say?*

**Focus Particle:** a form that modifies any part of speech and signals new information or contrast between what is said and what is assumed to be known or have been said. Focused information is generally stressed or somehow made salient. Examples of focus particles are *even* and *just*: *Even the DOG ate that casserole*, *The dog even ATE that casserole*, *The dog ate even THAT casserole*.

**Quotative:** a form that indicates the presence of direct or imitated speech, thought, or behavior. Examples of quotatives are *say, do, and, colloquially, go and like: She said / went / was like, "What are you doing?"*

These form classes require modern syntactic and discourse theory for proper identification and description. Importing current linguistics and its categories into lexicography is a difficult, uphill battle against the medieval, part-of-speech tradition. But editorial decisions should at least be sensitive to the negative tradeoffs in accuracy of adherence to such a tradition. It is entirely possible to continue to please the public without overdoing the prefatory material by adding abstruse form-classes.

The second recommendation has a motivation similar to the first's. Current semantic and pragmatic theory can help dictionaries be consistent and complete in definitions. It is one thing to exclude metaforms from the list of entries. But it is another thing to include them and then inaccurately capture the denotation. I know of no "meaningless forms" in any language. Even those forms that appear to be entirely grammatical in their meaning and hence "empty" (e.g., *of in a picture of Bob*) have determinate senses that are captured by the traditional defining formulas of dictionaries: Cf. WNWCD on *of* (1996: 940). Why not define all metaforms instead of focusing on a subset and characterizing those in terms of distribution statements?

COBUILD has shown that it is possible to have a simple and consistent defining style. It also is possible to have a defining vocabulary that accepts form classes beyond what lexicography has traditionally propagated without overcomplicating the attendant definitions. Lexicography is very up-to-date in its method — witness the prevalence of machine-readable databases. Why, then, perpetuate an outdated semantic metatheory?

By excluding certain metaforms or, more importantly, by including them and treating them as they do, dictionaries make choices that sometimes quietly reproduce social and political sympathies contrary to the otherwise expressed leanings of the dictionaries themselves. Thus a dictionary that includes focal *like*, calls it **nonstandard** or **colloquial**, and then defines it as **meaningless** sends very mixed signals. The dictionary satisfies its expressed obligation to record actual speech, but then it simultaneously devalues that speech by calling it **empty**.

## Notes

1. This judgment is not restricted to lexicography. The most recent theoretical semantics text lists some focus particles as adverbs (Larson and Segal 1995: 301).
2. I have been unable to find an explanation of this practice in the RHD's guide to the dictionary.

3. The AHD's definition is incorrect even as a distribution statement. Focal *like* obligatorily collocates with focal stress, not a pause, and must always precede the stress (Underhill 1988, Romaine and Lange 1991).

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