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The topos of *polite behavior*.

Semantic explorations in the thematic, narrative and
discursive structures of a lexical field.

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Introduction

In this article, we will present some partial results of an ongoing research dedicated to the description of *topical structures* represented by the lexicon, here: the French lexicon related to the notion of politeness.

A *topos*, at first, is a framework, a model or a view that thematizes (interprets) a given object. More technically speaking, the topos is the semantic configuration that characterizes the meaning of any object for a given actor or community of actors (such as, for instance, a speech community). By thematizing an object or a domain, a topos affirms something about this reference object by qualifying it or by charging it with a set of characteristics that possess a value – i.e. a relevance - for the given actor. In discussing the concept of the topos in the work of Ernst R. Curtius (1956) and referring to Quintilian, the German philosopher Otto Pöggeler (1973) insists that a topos is not a mere concept but represents rather a vision or a model, a scheme that *serves* to *recognize*, to treat situations and objects, to solve problems, to discuss and argue, etc.¹ In this sense, a topos represents a vision on which an actor holds because he *trusts* this vision which constitutes for him an *evidence*, an evidential basis for his doing.

By asserting a certain vision of a reference object, the topos acquires the form of a proposition or (as we prefer to say) an *utterance* in the sense of Algirdas J. Greimas (1970) and in the sense of Michel Foucault (1969) as well. In the form of an utterance, the topos articulates a knowledge (of the world) and is the result of a judgment, of an *apophantic doing* (Edmund Husserl 1999, 1939) and, more particularly, of a (in German) *Erfahrungsurteil* (1999 (1939)). The topos, in the form of an utterance, therefore offers:

1. a framing of the world (i.e. a *point of view* of the world of which the enunciator of the utterance is responsible);
2. a framework according to which an *actor* conceptualizes (understands, analyses, interprets, shares, etc.) the world (this is the topical or thematic part strictly speaking of the utterance)

In this sense, and as we shall see later, the topos of *polite behavior* forms a specific vision which identifies, circumscribes and positively thematizes among all types or forms of signifying actions of any actor, the one which signifies the social values attached to "good education", "propriety", "good manners", etc.

In other words, the actions of any actor present themselves as a kind of text "in motion" - a *textscape* (Stockinger 2015/2017) - which becomes interpretable and therefore also evaluable thanks to the framework proposed by the topos of *polite behavior*. Of course, other visions, other frameworks are possible. But to distinguish between acts that can be qualified as respecting politeness and actions that do not respect it, it is necessary to have a framework, a vision that stipulates it, otherwise this distinction could not be made.

The *apophantic function* seems to be a totally central feature of *any topos*. It refers directly to the *predicative function* of a topos in the sense of "constituting", "instituting" discursively the reality of an object and the fact that this institution or establishment of a reality depends on the choice between different possibilities, that it forms a framework or a model of the reality, of the so-called real world.

The hypothesis that we defend here is that the analysis of the semantics of the lexicon in the form of *topoi* and topical fields constitutes an approach, a promising heuristic to explore and apprehend the *common sense* (the *doxa*) of a culture in the sense of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983). Common sense can be understood, roughly speaking, as a set of *topoi* which ... :

1. ... are shared by "all" the community of speakers of a language² ;
2. ... qualify what is "obvious", "natural", for a community, a culture;

¹ Cf. also Walter Veit who affirms that « Begriffsgeschichte (...) ist schon keinesfalls Topik. » (1973, p. 205)

² In a style very similar to that of the archeology of knowledge of Michel Foucault, the German Romanist Hans R. Curtius specifies: « Die Toposforschung gleicht der 'Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen' im Gegensatz zur Geschichte der einzelnen Meister. » (Curtius, 1973 (1938) p. 14).

3. ... form constructions of meaning which are presupposed by secondary cultural elaborations in the sense of the semiotician Y. Lotman (2009)

The table below (figure 1) summarizes in French the main definitions and examples that document the simple lexeme {Politesse} on the lexical portal of the CNRTL (National Center for Textual and Lexical Resources)³ of the CNRS. These data come from the TLFi⁴, the computerized version of the TLF (Treasury of the French Language)⁵, the exceptional dictionary of French in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in 16 volumes published between 1971 and 1994.

<p>POLITESSE, subst. fém.</p> <p>A. – Au sing.</p> <p>1. Respect des bonnes manières, des règles de la bienséance ; bonne éducation. Anton. <i>Impolitesse</i>. [...]</p> <p>[...]</p> <p>♦ <i>Politesse du cœur</i> (v. <i>cœur</i> II D 3 c). Respect des bonnes manières non seulement dicté par les usages mais par des sentiments sincères. [...]</p> <p>SYNT. <i>Manuel de politesse</i> ; <i>code de la politesse</i> ; <i>politesse affectée, appliquée, appuyée, cérémonieuse, distante, enjouée, exagérée, excessive, exquisite, glacée, glaciale, parfaite, stricte, surannée</i> ; <i>politesse britannique, française, orientale</i> ; <i>se découvrir par politesse</i> ; <i>visite de politesse</i>.</p> <p>♦ <i>Formule* de politesse</i>.</p> <p>B. – P. méton., souvent au plur. Action, propos dénotant une bonne éducation, le respect des règles de la bienséance. <i>Politesses embarrassées, exagérées</i> ; <i>dire, faire une/ des politesse(s) à qqn</i> ; <i>échanger des politesses</i>. [...]</p> <p>♦ <i>Se confondre* en politesses</i>.</p> <p>♦ <i>Rendre la, une, sa politesse à qqn</i> ; <i>rendre des politesses à qqn</i>. Avoir à l'égard de quelqu'un le même comportement que celui qu'il a eu à notre égard. Synon. <i>Rendre la pareille</i>. [...]</p> <p>Prononc. et Orth. : [pɔlites]. Att. ds <i>Ac.</i> dep. 1694. Étymol. et Hist. 1. 1578 « état de ce qui est lisse, uni » [...].</p>

(Figure 1: TLFi : Some definitions and examples for the French lexeme {Politesse})

The TLFi article on the simple French lexeme {Politesse}⁶ (Figure 1) is composed of three main parts: the first two parts (noted respectively "A" and "B") are reserved for definitions and a series of examples of the reference lexeme. The third part brings together a set of miscellaneous information about the pronunciation and orthography of the lexeme, its etymology, its history, the frequency of its manifestation in the TLFi corpus, etc.

(Figure 2 : TLFi : An extract of the TLFi article dealing with the lexeme {Politesse})

The article developing definitions and examples of the lexeme {Politesse} (Figure 2) is part of a small dynamic website of the CNRTL lexical portal. This web site is in the form of a hyper-article composed of several headings that provide us with various information by means of which we can better deepen and contextualize the meaning, history and uses of our lexeme. For the researcher, one of the clear advantages of this genre of dynamic online publication is that it forms a node of aggregation and access to a variety of relevant data and (in principle) validated by previous lexicographic research. In other words, it offers a corpus practically "ready" for diverse research projects, including ours, which is interested in the thematic, narrative and discursive structure of a notion expressed by the lexeme (Politesse) and a whole lexical field which is associated with it.

³ <http://www.cnrtl.fr/>

⁴ <http://atilf.atilf.fr/>

⁵ For more information (in French), cf. <http://www.atilf.fr/spip.php?rubrique77>

⁶ A lexical data (lexeme, syntagmatic expression, ...) which serves as a study object is put into brackets {Lexical data}

1 – The thematic and narrative dimension of the topos of *polite behavior*

When we question the meaning of the lexeme {Politesse} and, more generally, of the lexical field associated with the notion of "politeness", we first focus on the first two parts (see Figure 1, part A and part B) of the article of the TLFi devoted to the simple lexeme {Politesse}.

The first part offers us a general definition of the lexeme {Politesse} as a singular substantive: politeness is the "respect of good manners, rules of propriety; good education". The second part of the article gives us a definition of politeness commonly used in plural: politeness means "action, [a] statement denoting good education, respect for the rules of propriety". According to the article devoted to the lexeme {Politesse}, this second definition maintains a metonymic relation with the first definition (see Figure 1, part "B").

The second definition thematizes first politeness as a concrete, behavior, that expresses, stages a "good education", "propriety". As we shall see in more detail below, this behavior, designated by the lexeme {Politesse} (and by a whole lexical field associated with it), is a behavior that contributes to the *maintenance*, the *preservation* of a *desired state of (symbolic or social) order*.

Given the very exceptional value of this type of behavior (i.e. of contributing, of serving to maintain a *desired (symbolic, social) state of order*), it requires "respect" by all "stakeholders". The reference to the notion of *respect* for this genre of behavior, is developed both by the first ("respect of good manners, ...") and by the second definition ("... respect for the rules of propriety"). In paraphrasing the two definitions, we can intuitively grasp certain general characteristics of the semantic universe of the lexical topos of *polite behavior* (Figure 3).

- 1) There is a specific form of behavior that contributes, serves to maintain a *desired state of (symbolic, social) order*, and this form is designated by the lexeme {Politesse}.
- (2) Someone who "enters the scene" (in front of someone else, in front of an audience) must know or is supposed to know that there is a form of behavior (designated by the Lexeme {Politesse} which contributes to the maintenance of a *desired state of (symbolic, social) order*.
- 3) Thus, it is expected that the person who "sets himself up" not only conforms to the expectations and constraints in this particular form of behavior designated by the lexeme {Politesse} but also acknowledges (confirms) its principal axiological function, viz. to contribute to the maintenance, the preservation of a *desired state of (symbolic, social) order*.

(Figure 3: Intuitive formulation of the basic structure of the (lexical) topos of the *polite behavior*)

The formulation of the (lexical) topos of the *polite behavior* in Figure 3 will guide us throughout our analysis. If we take a closer look at our paraphrase of the two definitions of the lexeme {Politesse}, we see that the topos of the *polite behavior* consists of two facets which are intrinsic to the structural form of all topoi:

1. a first *thematic* facet whose main function - *paradigmatic* in the sense of R. Jakobson - is to *type* and *categorize* the behavior concerned by our topos (this facet asserts, in other words, that politeness is a *genre* or a *form of behavior* that serves to maintain, to preserve a *desired state of (symbolic, social) order*,
2. a second *narrative* facet whose main function - *syntagmatic* in the sense of R. Jakobson - is to insert this very specific form of behavior in a *configuration* of relations and interactions between *actors* belonging to one (or more) *communities of actors* occupying and sharing (in a consensual or polemic way) a common milieu called (in reference to Husserl's phenomenology) *life-world*.

The formulation of the first facet in Figure 3 broadly identifies the common background of the *semantic universe* of our topos. On this common background a highly diverse topical and discursive field is developed, i.e. a great diversity of *semantic forms* which will make us discover a rich cultural vision of politeness as it is conveyed and transmitted by the lexicon of the French language. As we will see again, the topos of *polite behavior* is thus declined, differentiated in a variety of specific *versions* of the topos of *polite behavior* such as the versions of *polite decent* behavior, of *polite amiable* behavior, of *polite suitable* or again of *polite honest* behavior, but also of *polite condescending*, *servile* or *obsequious* behavior. This diversity of semantic forms allows continuous and almost imperceptible variations of meaning in the verbal or non-verbal use of the topos of *polite behavior*.

As far as the second facet is concerned, Figure 3 suggests the existence of a small narrative drama that depicts a game between several "conceptual entities" that we designate respectively as:

1. the [(polite) Behavior]⁷,
2. the [Performer],
3. the [Staging] (produced by the [Performer] with reference to the [(polite) Behavior]),
4. the [Public], i.e. the addressee of the [Staging] of the [Performer],
5. the [Opinion] who evaluates and sanctions the [Staging] of the [Performer] and who can be (but not necessarily is) a member of the [Public],
6. the [Community of actors] who represents variable constellations of actors, including constellations varying between those listed above,
7. the [Life-world] which represents the milieu occupied and shared by a [Community of actors].

(Figure 4: Conceptual entities needed for deploying the narrative facet of the topos of *polite behavior*)

By being integrated into the narrative drama, these "conceptual entities" put on *functional roles*, become *actants*, each of which plays its part in the emergence of the semantic richness of the topos of the *polite behavior*. The conceptual entity [(polite) Behavior] (Figure 4) thus plays the following three main roles:

1. the role of a *meaning object*, i.e. of an (intentional) object in the form of the topos of the *polite behavior* *thematized* or *qualified* by an actor (cf. below) playing the role of an enunciator who utters this topos);
2. the role of a *value object* insofar as it - in its thematization by the topos of the *polite behavior* - serves, contributes to the maintenance of a desired *state of (symbolic, social) order*;
3. the role of a *standard object* (or norm) insofar as its contribution to the maintenance of a desired *state of (symbolic, social) order* constrains the behavior of all implied actors.

Considering these three roles, we see that the first one fulfills an *epistemic function* offering a vision, an understanding of the (intentional) object [(polite) Behavior] while presupposing an ontology of these intentional objects (or noemes in the sense of "Edmund Husserl) of which the (intentional) object [(polite) Behavior] is a part. The second role ensures an *axiological function* showing the value of the (intentional) object [(polite) Behavior] in its understanding provided by the topos of the *polite behavior* which consists in the contribution of this type of behavior to the maintenance, the preservation of a desired *state of (symbolic, social) order*. Finally, the role of a standard object assumes a normative or *deontic function* because the value of the (intentional) object in its understanding provided by the topos of the *polite behavior* is that of serving to maintain a desired *state of (symbolic, social) order*. In its role as a standard object (as a "norm") the [(polite) Behavior] on the one hand allows and constrains⁸ the action roles (the "behavior") of the actors engaged in this small drama, and on the other hand constitutes a reference (a "framework") for all actors to "play their roles" as expected.

The conceptual entities [Performer], [Public] and [Opinion] (Figure 4) belong to a more general conceptual category called [Actor]. Together, they constitute a [Community of actors] (Figure 4) who occupy necessarily a common milieu called [Life-world]. The conceptual entity [Performer] occupies at least two main roles:

1. the role of the *subject referring* to the standard object [(polite) Behavior] (in order to interpret it, to use it faithfully, honestly, ... or, contrarily, to divert, to subvert it, ...);

⁷ Terms put between brackets [] designate concepts which *refer to* domains, objects, qualities, etc. (i.e. "objects" in the sense, for instance, of Brentano or Meinong) and which are *interpreted, provided with meaning or value* by *topoi* – understood as *uttered loci of knowledge and believe*.

⁸ In the English sense of the word « affordance »

2. the role of the *subject of doing* who behaves in a certain way, exhibits, displays a certain behavior “in front of” the [Public] and the [Opinion] observing and judging his doing. Like most of the other actantial roles, also the role of the subject of doing is a complex one (it represents, in the terminology of Greimas, a “collective actant”) which may be differentiated, for instance, in a *competent subject* (i.e. a [Performer] who is able to behave in a polite way), in a *voluntary subject* (i.e. a [Performer] who wants to behave in a polite way), an *executing subject* (i.e. a [Performer] who produces signs of behavior), etc.

With reference to the standard [(polite) Behavior] and, more precisely, to the particular view of this object offered by the *polite behavior* topos (or one of its versions), the subject of doing [Performer] exhibits a certain behavior, he presents as an *interpretation*, as a *particular staging* of this simultaneously constitutive and normative topos - an interpretation or staging that takes into account (or claims to take account of) the expectations and constraints (the specific affordances) of the vision offered by our lexical topos qualifying the intentional object [(polite) Behavior].

The conceptual entity [Public] (Figure 4) plays the role of the addressee of the staging of the [Performer]. The entity [Opinion] (Figure 4) can be a part of the [Public] (in this sense, the public not only is the addressee of a behavior produced by the [Performer] but also the judge of this behavior in reference to the standard object [(polite) Behavior]). The relation between the entity [Opinion] and the standard object [(polite) Behavior] is not explicitly developed in the two definitions of the lexeme {Politesse} (Figure 1) but is an indispensable complement to the one that is the main one, viz. the relation between the two entities [Performer] and [(polite) Behavior]. As a member of the [Public], [Opinion] thus plays at least two main roles:

1. the role of the *subject of observation*, which perceives, evaluates, judges and classifies (and "labels") the staging, the behavior exhibited by the subject of doing [Performer]. It is a complex role that differentiates into several more specialized roles: the role of the *subject of perception* (who looks, reads, experiences, ... the behavior of the [Performer]), the role of the *subject of evaluation* (who compares the behavior of the [Performer] with the standard [(polite) Behavior]), the role of the *sanctioning subject* who judges the behavior of the [Performer] and, lastly, the role of the *recognizing subject* (who declares, affirms the value of the behavior of the [Performer] and, by extension, the [Performer] himself).
2. the role of the subject referring to the standard [(polite) Behavior] (in order to interpret the behavior of the [Performer]).

Finally, the conceptual entity [Staging] (Figure 4) belongs to the broader category of [Perdurant] including the categories of [Doing] and [Practice]. Understood as belonging to the category [Doing], the [Staging] is interpreted here as the specific (gestural, acoustic, visual, ...) doing of the [Performer] – performed and/or evaluated in reference to the standard object [(polite) Behavior].

2 – The enunciation of the topos of *polite behavior*

From a phenomenological point of view (Edmund Husserl, 1986; Alfred Schütz, 1993), the two definitions of the French lexeme {Politesse} in the TLFi article dedicated to this lexeme (Figure 1), offer a (possible) thematization of the intentional object⁹ designated by the term [(polite) Behavior]. "Thematization" is a process, an act whose result is the theme (of the object) or rather, to be more precise, the *topos* understood as a both *thematic* and *narrative place* offering a vision (a "view") of an object whose existence¹⁰ is presupposed. In our case, we presuppose that there is something that we designate by the term [(polite) Behavior] which is qualified - thematized - by the topos of the *polite behavior*.

⁹ Cf. Algirdas J. Greimas and Joseph Courtés (1979, p.258) « [on] désigne du nom objet (...) ce qui est pensé ou perçu en tant que distinct de l'acte de penser (ou de percevoir) et du sujet qui le pense (ou le perçoit) ».

¹⁰ As the philosopher Klaus Held explains in his *Einführung* in the *Phänomenologie der Lebenswelt* of Edmund Husserl, « Wie auch immer ich mich (...) fühlend oder wollend oder praktisch tätig zu etwas mir Begegnenden verhalten mag, immer setze ich seine Existenz voraus. Die Benutzung eines Gebrauchsgegenstandes etwa oder die Liebe zu einem anderen Menschen wären nicht möglich ohne die Erfahrung, dass das was mir als brauchbar oder als liebenswert erscheint, überhaupt vorhanden ist. (...) » [HEL : 2002 :12]. In a more general way, the objects that interest us (i.e. which we are thematizing) are not only "Raumobjekte" (objects given in ordinary physical space such as a tree, a

By adopting a perspective similar to that of the archeology of knowledge of Michel Foucault (1969) or the theory of the semio-narrative utterance of A.J. Greimas (1970), "thematization" or "thematizing an object" means, as already stressed, the *enunciation* of a topos that qualifies (i.e. produces and at the same time affirms a "view" or "vision", in our case: the object designated by the term [(polite) Behavior]. The topos thus uttered (produced and asserted) is the topos of the *polite behavior*. In our case, this is a lexical topos, i.e. a topos which is contained in the expressions and uses of the French lexeme {Politesse} and a whole lexical field associated with it. This topos covers, as already said, a whole complex semantic universe that we will explore later in this study.

The topical utterance has a *generic, gnomic* character. It formulates and affirms a *model, a schema* (or again a framework) of a "targeted" object (i.e. of a domain, of a world, ...). The [Actor] occupying the role of the enunciator (i.e. the role of the subject of the enunciation of the *uttered discourse* thematizing the topos of the *polite behavior*) is - as is typically the case in discourses qualifying the meaning of a lexeme or a lexical field - *not defined, anonymous*. In the TLFi article on the reference lexeme {Politesse}, there is no trace of "someone" who - at some point in time - would have explicitly affirmed what we are trying to explain in a language of our own, that is, that polite behavior is "a particular form of behavior whose function is either to maintain, to preserve, or to tend towards a *desired state of (symbolic, social) order*". This topical utterance seems to cover the semantic universe of the lexeme {Politesse}, but it is by no means explicitly introduced at some point in the history of the French language to regulate and control linguistic exchanges using this expression.

It is, on the contrary, the product, the result of innumerable uses of this lexeme in history since, according to the indications given in the TLFi, the end of the 16th and the first half of the 17th century¹¹ – innumerable uses which have *co-evolved* towards a common form, a *common symbolic gestalt*, a mental fact (a *menti-fact* in the terminology of J. Huxley) which forms the basis, the tacit semantic basis for speakers employing in their communications the French expression {Politesse} or other expressions that are a part of the lexical field of politeness.

Like the anonymous [Actor] playing the role of the enunciator, also the [Actor] playing the role of the enunciatee, that is, the addressee of the utterance developing the topos of *polite behavior* remains undefined, is not, in the TLFi article devoted to the lexeme {Politeness}, identified more particularly. In other words, the [Community of actors] engaged in the enunciation of the topos of *polite behavior* constitute an anonymous "(every-)one" which, historically and sociologically speaking, broadly covers the community of the (competent) French speakers of today, heirs of a rich lexical semantic heritage carried, transmitted by the topos in question.

Finally, also the (contextual, spatiotemporal) perimeter of the scope of the enunciative assertion is not determined in the article of the TLFi devoted to the lexeme {Politesse}. In other words, what is asserted in the topos qualifying the (intentional) object [(polite) Behavior] is indeed "*more or less*" true everywhere and at all times, "*practically*" for any occasion, etc. The topical utterance of the *polite behavior* (i.e. of what it is, this object "polite behavior") thus raises the question of the *truth regime* of the formulaic expression "*it is said that ...*" (Jean Claude Coquet (1984), Alain Berrendonner (1985)), of the *doxa*, of the hearsay, of the *common sense*. The "*under-determination*" of the enunciator's and the enunciatee's identity, as well as of the context, of the perimeter of the enunciative field seems to be precisely an indispensable condition that allows the lexicon - or, rather, the part of the lexicon called the "fundamental vocabulary" - of a language to remain as open and adaptable as possible in order to be used in a wide variety of contexts and by speakers who share little more than the "intuitive and "obvious" meaning of the words they use to communicate - here: to communicate about the politeness of someone's behavior. We thus see clearly the following two levels that must be distinguished:

1) A first level of *common sense* as defined by, for example, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983), that is, a meaning which is (naturally, intuitively, spontaneously, ...) shared and used by all members of a community. As far as our object of study is concerned, this is, as already said, the community of to-day's (competent) French speakers who, in their linguistic practices and uses, refer to the topos of the *polite behavior* in order to exploit in a more or less fine, more or less appropriate, more or less faithful manner the rich lexical semantic heritage carried, transmitted by this topos. Common sense specifies the *fundamental semantics* (in the sense of Algirdas Julien Greimas, 1979) of the [Life-world] of a [Community of actors]. In our case,

mountain, a tool, etc.) but also so-called abstract objects such as, for example, *politeness, respect, tradition, morals*, etc. by means of which we identify our identities, our relations with ourselves and the others.

¹¹ Cf. la rubrique « Etymologie » du TLFi : <http://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/politesse/substantif>

this is the *semantics of the common sense* of the object [(polite) Behavior] thematized by the topos of the *polite behavior* and expressed by the lexeme {Politesse} and by a whole lexical field associated with it.

2) A second level of the specialized meanings (specialized conceptions or models) of the object [(polite) Behavior]. Only in these *secondary elaborations* (in the sense of the semiotics of the cultures of Y. Lotman) will be developed, clarified more precisely both the actors playing the role of enunciators, the enunciative field and finally the content itself of the (lexical) topos of the *polite behavior*. As typical examples we can mention, for instance, classic and modern textbooks addressed to the young girl or the young man of the "good society"; the "golden books" of politeness addressed, for example, to travelers, practical guides (for impeccable conduct in society, at table, for a successful presentation of oneself, etc.), the innumerable training courses in "good behavior", etc.

3 - Two constitutive utterances of the semantic universe of the topos of *polite behavior*

Among the - supposed - diversity of appropriate behaviors, we find a particular type that is the one whose content, specific meaning is developed, explained in the TLFi article devoted to the reference lexeme {Politesse}. As we have already seen, the elementary basis of this thematization consists of the two *thematic* and *narrative* facets of the topos (lexical) of the *polite behavior*:

1. the *thematic* facet which occupies essentially a paradigmatic function (in the sense of R. Jakobson) identifies and qualifies the behavior in question;
2. the *narrative* facet that occupies a syntagmatic function (again in the sense of R. Jakobson) identifies and qualifies the main conceptual entities and roles (or actants) involved and the interactions between these entities and roles following some basic (narrative) schemas.

The introduction and qualification (i.e. definition- description and affirmation) of these two facets are the object of *two complementary generic utterances* which establish the common background of the semantic universe of the (lexical) topos in question:

First utterance: (The enunciator asserts that) the object [(polite) Behavior] is a particular behavioral form whose main function is either to maintain, to preserve or to tend towards, to reach a *wanted* or *desired state of (symbolic, social) order* for the territory [Life-world] of a [Community of actors].

Second utterance: (The enunciator asserts that) the (meaning) object [(polite) Behavior] as defined by the first utterance, constitutes the standard (the "norm") which obliges and in reference to which 1) the [Performer] in the role of the subject of doing stages himself and 2) the [Opinion] – in its role of the subject of observation - evaluates and judges this staging.

The first utterance asserts, in other words, that the traces of the particular and positive act are inscribed and perceptible in the concrete gesticulations of the subject of doing [Performer] staging himself in front of the subject of observation [Opinion]. According to this discourse, politeness is a form of action that contributes to the fact that social life in the territory [Life-world] which is shared by the [Community of actors] unfolds and evolves according to a vision of well-being, of what is good. The (lexical) topos of the *polite behavior* here forms and functions as a *topos of categorization* which affirms more particularly that a *polite behavior* is a behavior that serves for the preservation of a *desired state of (symbolic, social) order*.

The second utterance asserts the existence of the constellation - or configuration - that we have already discussed previously between the objects [(polite) Behavior], [Performer] and [Opinion], all of which belong to the [Life-world] of the [Community of actors]. This constellation or configuration requires that the object [(polite) Behavior] in its version of the topos of the *polite behavior* occupies the role of a standard object which obliges and serves as a reference for the [Performer] in his role of the subject of doing, that is, of a subject which exhibits, stages himself, and for the [Opinion] in his role of the subject of observation which evaluates and judges the staging - the "behavior" - of the [Performer].

Its status as a standard or norm to be followed, the object [(polite) Behavior] deduces from its particular value to embody all forms of concrete behavior that serve to maintain, to preserve a *wanted* or *desired state of*

(*symbolic, social*) order for the [Life-world] of the [Community of actors]. This is the *axiological dimension* specific to the semantic universe of the object [(polite) Behavior]. It is precisely the *recognition* of this dimension of the value of the object [(polite) Behavior] and its truthful (in the sense of *trustful*) use by the [Performer] which can cause problems. As we shall see, this is the whole problematic of "true politeness", "politeness of heart" and, *a contrario*, of "exaggerated politeness", "politeness of vain formulas", and so on which is introduced here and which indeed traverses not only the article of the TLFi devoted to the lexeme {Politesse} but also the whole lexical field associated with this lexeme.

Thus, a - if not *the* - central thematic and narrative dimension that will be developed by several more specialized discourse-utterances is that of the (*sincere, ...*) *recognition* of the specificity of the object [(polite) Behavior] as an asset, as a positive value for the maintenance of a *wanted* or *desired state of (symbolic, social) order* for the territory [Life-world] of the [Community of actors].

As we shall see in the next chapter, the first two discourse-utterances introduce a variety of more specialized ones and form with them the *universe of discourse* of politeness "à la française" (i.e. expressed and communicated by the lexeme {Politesse} and the lexical field associated with it). The role of the first two utterances is to establish the *background* and the *horizon* of the semantic universe of the topos of *polite behavior*. In this sense, they have the status of discourse-utterances which are constitutive for a semantic universe - without them, the other discourse-utterances would simply not be possible. All the other discourse-utterances presuppose them in the logical as well as the historical or (morpho-genetic) sense of the term. The common background introduced and qualified by the first two constitutive utterances will serve as an *epistemic basis* for the other utterances to enrich and structure the semantic universe of the topos of the *polite behavior* and to introduce its multiple versions of which we will encounter a certain number in the next chapter.

Before examining the diversity of the conceptions of the politeness covered by the semantic (thematic and narrative) universe of the topos (lexical) of *polite behavior*, let us remember that:

1. the first utterance affirms the *thematic specificity* of the object [(polite) Behavior] (in relation to other forms of behavior), this thematic specificity consisting essentially of the *axiological dimension* of the [(polite) Behavior] as an element, a means contributing to the maintenance of a *wanted* or *desired state of (symbolic, social) order* for the [Life-world] of the [Community of actors];
2. the second utterance affirms the *specific narrative configuration* in which the object [(polite) Behavior] in its function as a standard object is recognized and used by the [Performer] and the whole [Community of actors] living in the [Life-world] territory.

The two utterances are, we may recall, the *constitutive members* of a more *complex discourse*, of a universe of discourse. This universe of discourse qualifies and develops the *meaning*, the specific *value* of the intentional object [(polite) Behavior] and provides us with a model - an *epistemic construction* - particular among many other models, other (always) possible epistemic constructions. It produces and affirms, in other words, a *possible world* - which is, in a first approximation, the world of the ("*French*") *common sense*, i.e. of the meaning shared by the speakers of the French language using the lexeme {Politesse} and the lexical field associated with it.

Finally, let us underline the fact that the various elements we have introduced in this chapter to produce a first general description of the semantic and narrative universe of the (lexical) topos of *polite behavior* are part of a *semiotic ecosystem* - of a dynamic system of *production* and *use* of *meaning* and *signs* expressing, staging this meaning. In our case, this is the semiotic ecosystem of politeness, or even more precisely, of the ecosystem of the ("*French*") common sense of politeness.

4 – The abounding semantic universe of the topos of *polite behavior*

As we have just seen, the first two utterances thematize the *common background* of the semantic universe of the topos of *polite behavior*. They are part of a more elaborate, more complex discourse that develops all the semantic richness covered by this topos. The common ground consists in the double assertion:

1. that there exists a *certain type of behavior* which contributes to the maintenance, preservation of a *desired state of (social, symbolic) order*
2. and that this type of behavior occupies the position of a *standard*, a standard object *recognized* by the actors concerned by this behavior and *used* in a sincere way.

Based on this common background, a variety of discourse-utterances are developed which propose more specific topoi (i.e. thematic and narrative configurations). These more specific topoi are *versions* of the *polite behavior* topos. A version, as we shall see immediately, describes "styles" of particular politeness as, for example, those which emphasize the *amiability* of the subject of doing [Performer], those which insist rather on the *distinctiveness* in his behavior, those that focus more on his *honesty*, those that emphasize his *decency*, and so on.

The systematic analysis of this immense semantic richness covered by the topos of the *polite behavior* and by its different versions is the object of a more important research work that we hope to be able to publish at the end of 2018. Here we shall content ourselves in identifying and presenting succinctly the most central discourse-utterances. For the exploration and systematic description of the richness of this semantic universe we will rely more particularly on:

1. a series of lexical expressions used to define the meaning of the lexeme {Politesse} in the article of the TLFi (the Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé) – lexical expressions such as {Bonnes Manières}, {Bonséance}, {Bonne éducation} or {Savoir-vivre} – as well as a series of lexico-syntagmatic expressions of which the pivotal element is the lexeme {Politesse} – syntagmatic expressions such as {Politesse française}, {Politesse de cœur}, {Politesse surannée}, {Politesse excessive} or {Politesse glaciale}.
2. a list of 40 (of course partial) synonyms of the lexeme {Politesse} identified and treated by the excellent Electronic Dictionary of Synonyms¹² of the CRISCO¹³ lab at the University of Caen. Among these synonyms we find: {Affabilité}, {Amabilité}, {Aménité}, {Bonséance}, {Bon ton}, {Bonnes manières}, {Civilité}, {Complaisance}, {[Compliment}, {Convenance}, {Correction}, {Courtoisie}, {Cérémonial}, {Cérémonie}, {Distinction}, {Décence}, {Déférence}, {Délicatesse}, {Façon}, {Galanterie}, {Gracuseté}, {Hommage}, {Honnêteté}, {Manière}, {Obséquiosité}, {Respect}, {Retenue}, {Réserve}, {Salamalec}, {Salutation}, {Savoir-vivre}, {Servilité}, {Sociabilité}, {Tact}, {Tenue}, {Ton}, {Urbanité}, {Usage}, {Education}, {Egards}.

A systematic and comparative examination of these lexical data shows us that on the basis of the first and second discourse-utterance constituting the semantic universe of the (lexical) topos of *polite behavior*, a fairly impressive number of *more specific discourse-utterances* is elaborated offering a high diversity of forms or "styles" of politeness. We will now present succinctly each one of them.

A third discourse-utterance thematizes the *moral version* of the topos of *polite behavior*. This version describes a form of polite as a *good* – a morally appreciable - behavior (in the [Life-world] of the [Community of actors]). Among the lexemes of the lexical field of politeness which express this particular meaning, we find, for example, the lexemes {Bonnes manières}, {Bonséance}, {Convenance}, {Décence}, {Tact}, {Usage}, or again {Correction}. The topos stated by this discourse forms rather a *topical field* which describes a certain diversity of forms and styles of politeness in its version of a moral behavior: forms and styles of behavior relative to *conformity to traditions and customs*, to (personal) *decency*, etc.

A fourth discourse-utterance thematizes the *referential version* of the topos of *polite behavior*. This version identifies and qualifies, among a diversity of possible cultural models, those to which the [Performer] must refer to stage, in front of the [Public] and the [Opinion] and to which the [Opinion] has to refer in its evaluation of the behavior of the [Performer]. This specific topos covers, once more again, a group of specialized topoi – a topical field - that offers us a variety of referential versions of the topos of the *polite behavior*. Clearly, in the lexical field used to express the topos of *polite behavior*, we can detect cultural and historical references that have played a vital role in the - to use an eloquent expression of Norbert Elias – civilizational process of the Occident (Norbert Elias 1997). Such cultural and historical references include, for instance, references to:

- the *court* and the *nobility* (cf., for example, the lexemes {Courtoisie}, {Galanterie}, {Servilité});

¹² <http://www.crisco.unicaen.fr/des/>

¹³ More information about CRISCO (Centre de Recherche Inter-Langues sur la Signification en Contexte): <http://www.crisco.unicaen.fr/des/>

- the valorising opposition between the *urban way of life* (see, for example, the lexeme {Urbanité}) and the *rural way of life* (see, for example, the lexeme {Rusticité});
- the *acculturation* thematizing the opposition between on the one hand raw, savage nature and on the other hand savoir-vivre and refinement (see, for example, the lexemes {Civilité}, {(bonne) Education}, ... vs {Goujaterie}, {Muflerie} {Rudesse}, {Barbarie}, {Sauvagerie}, ...);
- the *sensitivity of the heart* (see, for example, the lexemes {Tact}, {Délicatesse}, {Amabilité}, {Retenue}, ... vs {Insolence}, {Irreverence}, {Licence}, etc.);
- the Orient (see, for example, the lexeme {Salamalec}).

A fifth discourse-utterance thematizes the *cognitive version* of the topos of *polite behavior*, i.e. behaving in a manner conform with the standard object [(polite) Behavior] presupposes knowledge and know-how. The cognitive version designates a knowledge or, to use the technical term, a competence, that is to say: 1) a knowledge of what is the standard object [(polite) Behavior] (i.e. thematized and qualified by the topos of *polite behavior* or of one of its versions); 2) a know-how in the form (for example) of "gestural skills" to express oneself, to stage oneself in accordance with the standard object [(polite) Behavior]. The typical lexemes that express this version are {Savoir-vivre} and {Bonne éducation}. But their (partial) synonyms such as {Civilité}, {Urbanité}, {Délicatesse}, {Tact}, {Bonnes manières}, etc. show that this version is deeply determined by the *moral version* (= third discourse-utterance) of the topos of *polite behavior* suggesting that the "knowledge" or the "know-how" in the staging of the [Performer] can only be judged as genuinely polite if it is guided by a profound moral sense.

A sixth discourse-utterance thematizes the *recognitive* (or *anagnoretic*) version of the topos of *polite behavior*. This version highlights the fact that the knowledge of the standard object [(polite) Behavior] is not sufficient for a staging on the part of the [Performer] that conforms to the constraints or specificities of the said standard object. To do this, the [Performer] must recognize the function of the standard object in question, i.e. position himself as a subject in the *deontic field* which regulates the relations between the referring subject [Performer] and the standard object [(polite) Behavior]. This is expressed by the lexeme {Respect} and a series of (partial) synonyms such as {Vénération}, {Révérence}, {Hommage}, {Déférence}, {Considération}, {Adoration}, {Distinction}, {Egards}, {Estime}, {Observance}, {Loyauté}, {Affection}, {Humilité}, {Honneur}, and so on.

A seventh discourse-utterance thematizes more specifically the *truthful version* of the topos of the *polite behavior*. This version makes it possible to distinguish between forms of this behavior which are more or less sincere or, on the contrary, more or less doubtful, strange or artificial. It expresses itself typically in syntagmatic expressions such as {Politesse de cœur}, {Politesse affectée} and {Politesse cérémonieuse} or again in lexemes such as {Honnêteté}, {Probité}, {Décence}, {Amabilité}, {Obséquiosité}, {Gracieuseté}, {Déférence}, etc.

An eighth discourse-utterance thematizes the *experiential* and *sensitive version* of *polite behavior* topos. "Sensitive and experiential version" of the *polite behavior* topos means that the meaning, the value of a staging performed by the [Performer] in front of the [Public] depends on the production of perceptible signs that constitute, for the [Opinion] in the role of a subject of observation (of an *interpreting subject*), signifying configurations. The (noematic) meaning of these signifying configurations is induced in reference to - to speak thus - of the "mental images" which thematize, which qualify the [(polite) Behavior] in its role as a standard object, as an object to be followed, as a cultural reference. The thematization or qualification of sensitive impressions is done using the semantic dimensions constituted by gradual oppositions such as "conform" vs "distinct", "transparent" vs "blur", "smooth" vs "rough", "regular" vs "irregular", "sweet" vs "screaming", "simple" vs. "complicated", etc. These oppositions are intrinsically coupled with a valuing hierarchization based on the *cognitive, anagnoretic* and *truthful* versions of a staging produced by the subject of doing [Performer] with reference to the standard object [(polite) Behavior]. In other words, behavioral signs that are judged, for example, as gossip or "surfeited", generally bear a rather questionable politeness. The experiential and sensitive version is present in many (partial) synonyms of the lexeme {Politesse}. The most talkative are: {Délicatesse}, {Douceur}, {Grace}, {Régularité} or {Tact}.

A ninth discourse-utterance thematizes the version of the *autonomous subject* of the *polite behavior* topos, i.e. of the autonomy of the subject of doing [Performer] in his concrete behavior, in his staging in the [Life-world] of the [Community of actors]. The discourse developing this specific version of the topos of *polite behavior* can be observed in the definitions and examples provided by the TLFi of a small group of partial synonyms of the reference lexeme {Politesse}. The core of this small group consists of lexemes such as {Déférence}, {Obséquiosité} and {Servilité}. These three lexemes are surrounded by and interacting with a set of other lexemes that further profile the general problem at stake here, namely that a "true" politeness

presupposes not only knowledge and recognition of it (see the discourse-utterances developing the *cognitive* and *recognitive* versions of the topos of the *polite behavior*) but also a *relative freedom - neither too great nor too small* - of the subject of doing [Performer] and the addressee [Public]. Among the lexemes which surround the three lexemes that we have just introduced, we can quote, for example, the lexemes {Condescendance}, {Complaisance}, {Adulation}, {Flatterie} and {Courtisanerie}.

A tenth discourse-utterance introduces the *temperance version* of the *polite behavior* topos. This version thematizes the *control* or *power* that the subject of doing [Performer] has over his own staging in front of the addressee who is the [Public]. The degree of control or power is a consequence of a balanced interaction between two opposing forces - an *agonistic force* and an *antagonistic force*. The more unbalanced the interaction, the more the power or control of the subject becomes either *excessive* or *insufficient*. This discourse-utterance merely develops an obvious consequence of the discourse utterance thematizing the version of the *autonomy of the subject* of the *polite behavior* topos. Typical lexemes that express this discourse are: {Retenue}, {Réserve}, {Convenance}, {Gravité}, {Dignité}, {Circonspection}, {Prudence} or {Calme}.

An eleventh discourse-utterance develops more particularly the version of *sociability* of the *polite behavior* topos. This specialized topos (representing a highly differentiated topical field) emphasizes the different ways in which the [Performers] is opened to the addressee of his staging, the [Public]. This dimension is presented in a fairly evident way in the following lexemes: {Amabilité}, {Affabilité}, {Aménité}, {Grace}, {Gracieuseté}, {Galanterie}, {Bonhomie}, {Délicatesse} ou {Douceur} (vs {Froideur}, {Grossièreté}, {Goujaterie}, ...). A more systematic examination of these lexemes would emphasize a variety of forms or styles, on the one hand, of the *self-staging* of the [Performer] and, on the other hand, of the *critical look*, the *appreciation of the other* (i.e. the [Public]).

A twelfth discourse-utterance introduces the *emotional* or *affective version* of the topos of *polite behavior*. Central in this version is the *empathetic* dimension, i.e. the ability of the [Performer] to feel the emotional state of the addressee of his staging, i.e. the [Public]. Affectivity - and more particularly empathy - as a particular form of politeness is expressed, for example, by the syntagma (Politesse glaciale) and, again, by a whole series of lexemes which are (partially) synonymous with the reference lexeme {Politesse}: {Amabilité} and {Affabilité} (which are also used to express the sociability version of the topos of *polite behavior*) {Bonhomie} as well as {Bonté}, {Gentillesse}, {Bienveillance}, {Complaisance}, {Douceur}, {Obligeance}, {Prévenance}, {Serviabilité}, etc.

A thirteenth discourse-utterance develops the *ritual* or *ritualistic version* of the topos of *polite behavior*. Expressed by lexemes such as {Usage}, {(Bonnes) manières}, {Savoir-vivre}, {Cérémonial}, {Etiquette}, {Protocole} or {Façons}, this version emphasizes that the standard object [(polite) Behavior] also includes the fact that of being a *regulated practice*, a practice that is based on traditions and habits. The concrete staging of the subject of doing [Performer] in front of the addressee [Public] is therefore evaluated (by the [Opinion]) also in relation to this "ritual" characteristic. The presence of lexemes such as {(Good) manners} or {Savoir-vivre} clearly shows that the ritual dimension maintains close relations with the *moral* and *cognitive dimensions* in the semantic universe of the topos of the *polite behavior*.

A fourteenth discourse-utterance finally introduces a version of the topos of *polite behavior* which can be found in all the other versions, which "serves" as a sort of *framework* of *evaluation* and *hierarchization* of the *quality* of a concrete staging of the subject to doing [Performer] with reference to the standard object [(polite) Behavior]. This appreciative version of the topos of *polite behavior* is defined by a very general topos that can be found in many domains of the lexicon of a natural language. It is the topos of *accuracy*, the *balance (the symmetry)* or the "*happy medium*". By considering the French lexeme {Justesse}, a significant part of its semantic universe is concerned - according to the data that the TLFi and the DES offer us - by the thematization of the *conformity* between a "*given*" (for example, a concrete behavior in the form of a series of gesticulations, words, etc.) and a "*model*" (for example, a vision, a "view" of what is "polite behavior"). As already said, this appreciative version is found in all the other versions cited. Its role is to evaluate and prioritize the [Staging] of the subject of doing [Performer], about its *moral quality*, its *cognitive, recognitive or trustful quality*, its *sensitive quality*, its *emotional quality*, etc. We must stress here the central cognitive place of this topos in the reasoning based on the common sense conveyed, in our case, by a lexical field.

These twelve discours-utterances, which contribute to the structuring of the semantic universe of the topos of *polite behavior*, are supplemented by a set of other discourse-utterances for which the main function is to develop and qualify the *anti-universe of politeness*, i.e. the semantic universe of the reference lexeme {Impolitesse} and of a whole lexical field associated to it. We have no place here to present this semantic universe.

Some general conclusive considerations

As we will develop it in more detail in another publication dedicated to the topical structure of the lexicon, the twelve dimensions listed occupy more general cognitive and discursive functions:

1. The *moral*, *cognitive*, *recognitive* and *truthful* versions of the topos of *polite behavior* are used for the *common sense* conception of the *specific value* – the *specific axiological function* – of the standard object [(polite) Behavior] (viz. to be a specific type of behavior that contributes to the maintenance, the preservation of a *desired state of (symbolic, social) order* in the territory of the [Life-world] of the [Community of actors]).
2. The *experiential* and *sensitive* version as well as the *referential* version of the topos of *polite behavior* contribute to the *common sense* conception of both *perceptual* and *cultural models* that symbolize, represent the specific value of the object [(polite) Behavior].
3. The versions of the *autonomous subject*, of *sociability*, of *temperance*, of *emotionality* and *empathy* and of *rituality* contributes to the *common sense* conception of the *qualities of [Staging]* of the subject of doing [Performer] under the auspices of the standard-object [(polite) Behavior] and in relationship with the [Public] and the [Opinion].
4. Finally, the version of *equilibrium*, of *symmetry* is used for the common sense conception of thematizing a *prototype* of the “*true*”, the “*best kind of*” *politeness* and of distinguishing, evaluating and hierarchizing qualitatively different forms of politeness expressed, staged by the subject of doing [Performer].

The topoi of the various discourse-utterances we have presented very quickly in this article, offer specific versions of the topos of *polite behavior*, i.e. more specialized forms and “styles” of politeness. In addition, each more specialized topos offers in turn a flexible and broad framework allowing the emergence of a *variety of behavioral nuances*. Thus, for example, the specialized topos of *sociability*, which feeds on the common ground of the semantic universe of the topos of *polite behavior*, can embody sometimes more amiable nuances, sometimes more distinguished notes, sometimes a more graceful behavior, etc. All these forms which suggest a *gradual, continuous* (and not categorical and discontinuous) *principle in semantic categorization* can indeed be examined and described in a very precise way thanks, in particular, to the Electronic Dictionary of Synonym¹⁴ of the CRSCO research laboratory of the university of Caen. Without being able to enter into more details here, let us note two particular methods which have greatly helped us in our work on the lexeme {Politesse} and the lexical field associated with it:

First method: *The method of lexical cliques*. A clique is a subgraph whose vertices are all adjacent two-by-two. A lexical clique is therefore a group of lexemes around a reference lexeme which are adjacent to each other (and therefore semantically closer than with other lexemes). The lexeme {Politesse} thus knows 66 cliques¹⁵. One of these 66 cliques is composed of the following lexical series: <{Amabilité}, {Civilité}, {Courtoisie}, {Politesse}, {Savoir-vivre}, {Urbanité}>. The six lexemes composing the clique in question are all adjacent and thus form a subgraph of the (gigantic) graph representing the synonymic relations between the reference lexeme {Politesse} and all the other 40 lexemes which are part of the list of (partial) synonyms.

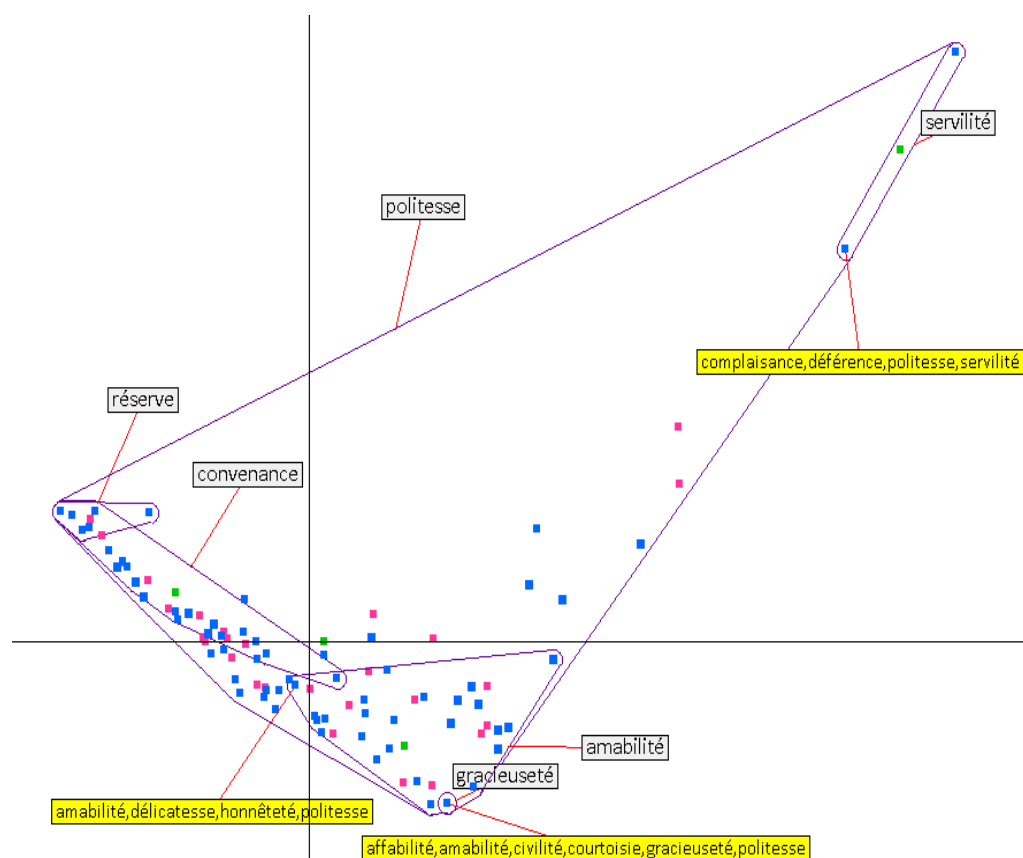
Second method: *The method of visualization of semantic space*. Figure 5 shows a visualization of the space of the *semantic universe* of the (lexical) topos of *polite behavior*. Over this space are distributed small squares (in distinct colors) symbolizing the position either of a clique or of a single lexeme (belonging to the 40 partial synonyms related to the lexical field of politeness). In the lower part of this space we see a *very dense* distribution of such squares together forming an oblique band. The upper part of the semantic space, on the other hand, is rather sparsely populated with squares. Without going into too much detail here, this distribution suggests a whole series of remarkable characteristics of the semantic universe that interest us here:

- There exists a *specific dimension of meaning* of the lexeme {Politesse} which forms the *common stratum* to all the more specialized semantic forms of the semantic universe in question (this specific dimension of meaning is indeed is thematized by the first two constitutive discourse-utterances).

¹⁴ <http://www.crisco.unicaen.fr/des/>

¹⁵ Cf. <http://www.crisco.unicaen.fr/des/synonymes/politesse>

- On this common stratum are developed *secondary strata*, i.e. semantic regions which are more circumscribed and which correspond to the number of cliques of a given reference lexeme (for example, it can be seen in Figure 5 that the semantic region of the lexeme {Servilité} includes only two cliques).
- A secondary stratum belongs to one of the more *specialized discourse-utterances* introduced above (but a more specialized discourse-utterance can thematize a topos that covers more than one secondary stratum).
- The *extent* of the semantic region of a stratum is computed by the presence of the concerned lexeme in the whole set of cliques (thus the extent of the semantic region of the lexeme {Gracieuseté} (Figure 4) is minimal; the lexeme {Gracieuseté} appears in only one clique).
- Certain regions are *connected*, or even *strongly connected*, thus suggesting *flexible meaning passages* from one version of polite behavior to another (this is the case, for instance, for the regions of the three lexemes {Réserve}, {Convenance} et {Amabilité} (Figure 5)).
- Some other regions are *not connected* suggesting hence a *categorical change* between two versions of polite behavior.



(Figure 5: Visualization of the semantic space of the (lexical) tops of *polite behavior*)

We will discuss further the structure and the internal dynamics of the semantic space of the tops of *polite behavior* in another work. In any case, we can see that this method - together with that of lexical cliques - offers us a very effective tool for exploring in a systematic and refined way common sense visions, i.e. the *fundamental semantics* produced by a lexicon.

To conclude our work on the lexical topos of *polite behavior*, we would like to come back to the distinction introduced in linguistics by Bernard Pottier (1986) between what he calls the level of *conceptual schemes* and the level of *linguistic signs*, i.e. that of *language*. In the light of this distinction, we have tried to study the level of *conceptual schemes* in using for this lexical data (i.e. data from the linguistic part of the distinction proposed by Bernard Pottier).

In this sense that we have specified that the topos of *polite behavior* is a lexical topos, i.e. a topos expressed by the lexeme {Politesse} and a whole lexical field which is associated to this lexeme of reference. In other terms, it is the *lexicalized part* of a conceptual schema (i.e. of the *conceptual topos*) of *polite behavior*. Comparisons with the lexical fields of other languages of the same family as that of French or other families, living or already extinct, "natural" or specialized, etc. would allow us to understand the specific part of the "French" representation of politeness. They would also enable us to identify common representations within the same geographical area (as is the case, for example, with most *referential versions* of the lexical topos of polite behavior) or with different areas distributed on the surface of our planet allowing us to induce migratory movements punctuating the recent or longer-lasting history of man. And, finally, they would allow us to make hypotheses on the *mental status* of the semantic universe of the topos of *polite behavior*.

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