

# 1 Introduction: where is philology?

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I am a philologist and not a philosopher – Paul de Man

## Love of words

Lexicology, the study of words, is a division of linguistic research to which a major contribution was made in the nineteenth century. Various methods philologists developed during this period may be collectively called historical principles, because they treated each and every word as an entity endowed with a temporal depth of its own. Historical principles helped lexicologists explain why some words had multiple meanings that seemed disparate and sometimes even contradictory with each other. For individual users of a given language, the semantic patterns of polysemous words may seem infinitely varied and mysteriously intricate like the crystalline patterns of snowflakes. In the eyes of nineteenth-century philologists, each word had a semantic web whose design reflected its history concerning, for example, how long it had been in circulation and how widely it had been spread. Within a short span of time, a given word may exhibit so slight a semantic change that its departure from the existing sense would seem almost negligible. After sufficient time, however, the variation of sense thus accumulated could be substantial enough to make the word look semantically schizophrenic. The trajectory of such alteration of meaning in a word would appear as a distinct pattern on its semantic web. If the word had retained much of its earlier usage, the pattern would exhibit shades of sense shifting gradually from one to the next. If it had lost many of its earlier meanings, its web would appear to have holes, hence obscuring connections among the currently available meanings. At least in its early stage, historical lexicology was restorative in nature, because it mended these semantic holes to recover the memory of words from previous generations.

Historical lexicologists had an outlook that departed from the one held in the previous era. Prior to the nineteenth century, scholars who took interest in words usually did so for one of two purposes. One was prescriptivism, which authorized certain lexical usage and labelled all others as incorrect. For the prescriptivists, therefore, the semantic web of each word consisted

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of one or a few ‘correct’ meanings situated in the middle and surrounded with the muddle of ‘errors’ and ‘solecisms’. The other was etymology, which sought to identify the original sense of each word and separate it from derivative meanings. For the etymologists, therefore, the contour of a semantic web was no more than a haze of secondary meanings that clouded the radiant point of origin at the centre. While prescriptivism and etymology had opposite vectors, one pointing towards the everlasting present and the other towards the moment of origin beyond reach of time, they were in essence the two sides of the coin of linguistic universalism, whose objective was to protect language from decay and to arrest the meanings of words in their ideal state. Because of their interest in the past, nineteenth-century philologists shared research material with the etymologists, but they would go back in time only as far as the material could take them. At that point, they would turn around and retrace the semantic footstep taken by each word, sometimes following the line of borrowing from one language to another, and sometimes pausing to examine cultural issues, social concerns and political events that might have cast influence on its usage.

Few lexemes can demonstrate the intricacy of semantic change better than the word *philology* itself. Its earliest known form is the Greek compound *φιλολογία*, which consists of *φιλο-* (‘love’) and *λόγος* (‘word’). The word *φιλολογία* therefore pertains to love of words taken as a collective whole (*logos*) rather than individual entities (*onoma*). The morphological construct of *philology* gives us a clue as to why this word has repeatedly subverted attempts to give it a single clear-cut definition: already in ancient Greek, the word *logos* was semantically so diverse that this compound had multiple meanings including ‘love of learning and literature’ and ‘love of argument or reasoning’ (Liddell and Scott 1996, s.v.). The semantic ambiguity of *φιλολογία* seems to have been exploited by Socrates when he applied to himself the adjectival form of the word, *φιλόλογος* as an epithet. In Aristotelian writings, philological investigations concerned the study of rhetoric, literary style and history (see Sandys 1903–8, I: 4–5). In the post-classical era, the title of *φιλόλογος* (used substantively) was assumed by Eratosthenes (c. 275–194 BCE), a Greek polymath and poet who served as director of the Alexandrian library. Some of his contemporaries called him a *pentathlos*, ‘all-rounder’, to honour his mastery in multiple areas of learning. Others called him *beta*, ‘second’, not necessarily because he was a second-tier scholar but at least because he was never deemed second to none in any one particular subject (Grant 1980, p. 147; see also Pfeiffer 1968, pp. 156–60). Whatever its precise connotation, Eratosthenes’ nickname *beta* reveals the nature of his engagement: he was not so much a specialist as a lover of words who applied his aptitude to disciplines whose medium was language. While philology has traditionally been associated with literature, it has also allied with other disciplines that require careful examination of texts, be they historical narratives, philosophical tracts, religious commentaries,

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legal documents or scientific treatises. The Latin equivalent of the Greek *φιλόλογος*, that is, *philologus*, could likewise be used substantively with a meaning varying from ‘person engaged in learned or literary pursuits’ to ‘man of letters’ to ‘learned man’ to ‘scholar’. Compared to the *grammaticus*, the *philologus* is concerned with language for the sake of a ‘broader culture’ as in ‘history, antiquities and literature’ (Lewis and Short 1907, s.v.).

The word *philology* has often been counted among the ranks of compounds ending with *-logy* to denote ‘study of’: e.g. *astrology*, *theology*, *archaeology*. The English language abounds in compounds of this category, since the morpheme *-logy* has long been used to coin new terms for specialized fields of study, mostly in earnest (e.g. *bacteriology*, *immunology*) but occasionally also in jest (*undergroundology*, *hatology*) (see Simpson 2000– [OED Online], –LOGY). Though being one of the earliest-attested words of this category, *philology* is structurally different from most other compounds ending with *-logy*. To take *archaeology* for an example, this word consists of two components (with the connective *-o-* in between), of which the second, *-logy*, denotes action (‘study’), and the first, *archaios*, signifies its object (‘that which is ancient or primitive’). This relationship is reversed in *philology*, in which action (‘love’) is expressed by the first component, and the object of its action (‘words’) is conveyed by the second (see Schestag 2007, p. 30).

In modern English, the morpheme *philo-* may be used to form nominal compounds denoting ‘lover of’ (e.g. *philo-dramatist*, *philo-theorist*) or adjectival compounds meaning ‘*x*-loving’ (e.g. *philo-musical*, *philo-mathematical*). Although the morpheme *philo-* has been productive enough to allow the formation of new words for more than two millennia, not many *philo-*compounds may be said to denote acts of mental exertion that are rigorous enough to be considered scholarly endeavours (see Simpson 2000–, PHILO–). Can we, for example, consider *philotimy* (‘love of honour’) or *philoxeny* (‘love of hospitality’) to be an established branch of learning? What about *philo-pig* (‘love[r] of pig’)? Augustine of Hippo scrutinized two acts of love, philosophy and philocaly, in his discussion on whether any type of study could lead one to truth and happiness. Pointing out that these two ‘have very similar surnames’, he treated them as siblings in their pursuit of knowledge through love:

They would seem to be – truly, they are – of the same family, so to speak. In fact, what is philosophy? It is love of wisdom. And what is philocaly? It is love of beauty. Consult the Greeks on this point. But, what is wisdom? Is it not the true beauty itself? Therefore, those two are assuredly akin, begotten of the same parent. (Augustine 1948, p. 140 [*Contra Academicos*, 2.3.7])

In a similar vein John of Salisbury, in the *Metalogicon*, introduces philology as a sibling of philocaly and philosophy, and treats these three sisters as allegorical figures representing one’s innate appetite for reason, beauty and

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wisdom, respectively. One should therefore prefer these three objects ‘to aught else’ and pursue them with the utmost prudence: ‘Although human infirmity dares not arrogantly promise these [three] to itself, it continually seeks after them, namely, after true goodness, wisdom and reason, and it is occupied in loving them, until, by the exercise of love with the help of grace, it [ultimately] attains the objects of its affection’ (John of Salisbury 2009, pp. 246–7).

#### Philology in the English lexicon

The English word *philology* has been in use since the early modern period, and it has wrought a complex web of meaning through the 500 years of iteration. While the subsequent chapters will examine philology as it was practised in the nineteenth century, this section will provide an overview of the history of the English word *philology* with special attention paid to its usage before and after this particular period. A convenient starting point may be the treatment of this word in several editions of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*). In both the first and second editions, *philology* is presented as an adoption of the French *philologie*, which itself was an adaptation of the Latin *philologia*, which in turn was a loanword from the Greek. In these editions, *philology* is given two major semantic divisions, general and specific. Of the two, the general sense is earlier than the specific one, with the first citation dated to 1614 for the former and 1716 for the latter. The third edition of the *OED* has pushed the *terminus a quo* of the general sense back to 1522 with a citation taken from the poetry of John Skelton (‘Nor of philosophy, Nor of philology, Nor of good pollycy, Nor of astronomy’). The date could be moved even further to the late Middle Ages, if we should recognize Chaucer’s and Lydgate’s references to anthropomorphized philology in Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (Simpson 2000–, s.v.).

In the first edition of the *OED*, which was completed in 1928 under the title *New English Dictionary* and reissued with corrections in 1933, the definitions of *philology* given under the general sense are reminiscent of those of Greek *φιλολογία* and Latin *philologia*: ‘the study of literature, in a wide sense, including grammar, literary criticism and interpretation, the relation of literature and written records to history, etc.; literary or classical scholarship; polite learning’. This section ends with a brief remark on usage: ‘Now rare in general sense’. The definitions of *philology* given under the specific sense are succinct: ‘The study of the structure and development of language; the science of language; linguistics’. The specific sense of *philology* is labelled as ‘in mod[ern] use’, and its section ends with a brief comment placed in square brackets, that this is ‘Really one branch’ of philology in the general sense (Murray, et al. 1933, s.v. (*italics in the original*)).

The second edition of the *OED* has retained the basic framework of the entry for *philology*, but added material from the *Supplement* volume

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published in 1982 (Simpson and Weiner 1989, s.v.; Burchfield 1972–86, s.v.). It therefore provides the general sense with the same definitions as before (i.e. ‘the study of literature, in a wide sense’, etc.) and the same usage note (i.e. ‘Now *rare* in *general* sense’). But this note is now appended with a seemingly minor modification: ‘except in the US’.<sup>1</sup> The second edition prints all of the quotations for the general sense given in the first edition, but it also offers a good number of new quotations. The function of this substantial addition, which derives from the *Supplement*, was apparently to support the modified usage note, since many of the quotations are from the writing of twentieth-century American authors such as the one by Benjamin Whorf given below:

ar1941 B. L. WHORF in *Ann. Rep. Board of Regents Smithsonian Inst. 1941* (1942) 502 As the major linguistic difficulties are conquered, the study becomes more and more philological; that is to say, subject matter, cultural data, and history play an increasing role ... This is philology. But at the base of philology we must have linguistics.

All of the original definitions for the specific sense of *philology* are found in the second edition (i.e. ‘the study of the structure’, etc.), but they are now followed by a long explanatory note: ‘Now usu[ally] restricted to the study of the development of specific languages or language families, esp[ecially] research into phonological and morphological history based on written documents.’<sup>2</sup> The overall impression given by the second edition of the *OED* is that the specific sense of *philology* has become even more specific by the late twentieth century to the point of being virtually obsolescent. This impression seems to be corroborated by the additional usage note, taken, again, from the *Supplement* and printed in smaller font at the end of the section: ‘This sense has never been current in the US. *Linguistics* is now the more usual term for the study of the structure of language, and, with qualifying adjective or adjective phrase, is replacing *philology* even in the restricted sense.’

The two versions of the *philology* entry just examined help us understand how the meaning and function of the word changed over the course of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> In the early twentieth century, the specific (or ‘modern’) sense of *philology* was so prominent that it had made the general (or traditional) sense of the word seem rare. By the 1980s, the specific sense of *philology* had become exceedingly narrow, because most of its semantic field had been taken over by *linguistics*. Seeing that the sense of *philology*

<sup>1</sup> This view seems to be advocated in R. W. Burchfield’s *Supplement*, which has a slightly different phrasing: ‘Still the usual sense in the US’ (Burchfield 1972–86, s.v.).

<sup>2</sup> The *Supplement* specifies this as British usage, arguing that this sense has never been widespread in the United States (*ibid.*).

<sup>3</sup> It was 1906 when the *New English Dictionary* published the original entry for *philology* in its fascicle for *Ph - Piper*.

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had shifted from general to specific to very narrow in less than 100 years, one may wonder whether the first two editions of the *OED* witnessed the decline of the field of language studies that had made its very production possible. But the entry for *philology* in the second edition also gives us a different picture: the progressive semantic narrowing outlined in the first two editions of the *OED* apparently did not affect the English-speaking world evenly. In the United States in particular, the specific sense of the word has never taken root and the general sense of the word might have never been marginalized.<sup>4</sup>

By noting the subtle changes made to the original entry for *philology* during the 1980s, we may be able to identify a number of issues that seem to have contributed to the destabilization of the semantic field of *philology* in the past century: a conflict between general and specific (or between traditional and ‘modern’) senses of the word, rivalry between *philology* and *linguistics*, and different usage observed within the English-speaking world. To this already complex picture might be added one more factor that however seems no less significant: correlation between the English word *philology* and its cognates in other languages. The earliest example of semantic intervention by a cognate of *philology* is probably the now obsolete meaning ‘love of talk or argument’, which was briefly circulated in the seventeenth century, with the first and last attested examples dated to 1623 and 1678, respectively. This usage, labelled as ‘Chiefly depreciative’, was apparently borrowed by learned doctors from one of the meanings of Greek *φιλολογία* and applied to *philology*, an English lexeme that had already existed as a loanword adopted from French *philologie* and used in the general sense (Simpson 2000–, s.v. section 2). As for the specific sense of the English word *philology*, a question was raised as early as 1922 by the Danish scholar Otto Jespersen. In his book *Language*, Jespersen suggests that the words *philology* and *linguist(ics)* be used in a way analogous to their cognates on the continent:

In this book I shall use the word ‘philology’ in its continental sense, which is often rendered in English by the vague word ‘scholarship’, meaning thereby the study of the specific culture of one nation; thus we speak of Latin philology, Greek philology, Icelandic philology, etc. The word ‘linguist’, on the other hand, is not infrequently used in the sense of one who has merely a practical knowledge of some foreign language; but I think I am in accordance with a growing number of scholars in England and America if I call such a man a ‘practical linguist’ and apply the word ‘linguist’ by itself to the scientific student of language.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Another possibility is that the general sense of *philology* had become rare all over the English-speaking world by 1906, but that it had been revived in the United States by 1989 (see Simpson 2000–, s.v.).

<sup>5</sup> Jespersen 1922, p. 64. A similar argument was made by John Webster Spargo, who translated Holger Pedersen’s *The Discovery of Language*. Spargo explains in the preface to the English edition, dated 1930: ‘In translating the Danish words *sprogvidenskab* and *filologi*, the English

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As implied by Jespersen, the specific sense of *philology* was a development almost exclusive to the English language. But this does not necessarily mean that philology had a monolithic sense or fixed usage in other modern European languages. On the contrary, the complexity of philology captured the imagination of continental scholars, particularly in the interbellum, who were compelled to deliberate on its potential. In a letter to Gerhard Scholem, dated 14 February 1921, Walter Benjamin calls attention to philology's unique ability to see the past from multiple perspectives – an ability, in other words, to work as a powerful antidote to the totalizing effects of history proper:

I have given some thought to philology ... I was always aware of its seductive side. It seems to me – and I do not know whether I understand it in the same sense as you – that, like all historical research, philology promises the same joys that the Neo-platonists sought in the asceticism of contemplation, but in this instance taken to the extreme. Perfection instead of consummation, the guaranteed extinction of morality (without smothering its fire). It presents one side of history, or better, one layer of what is historical, for which a person may indeed be able to gain regulative and systematic, as well as constitutive, elementary logical concepts; but the connection between them must remain hidden. I define philology, not as the science or history of language, but as the *history of terminology* [Geschichte der Terminologie] at its deepest level. In doing this, a most puzzling concept of time and very puzzling phenomena must surely be taken into consideration. If I am not mistaken, I have an idea of what you are getting at, without being able to elaborate on it, when you suggest that philology is close to history viewed as a chronicle [*Chronik*]. The chronicle is fundamentally interpolated history. Philological interpolation in chronicles simply reveals in its form the intention of the content, since its content interpolates history.<sup>6</sup>

### Philological turn

The second edition of the *OED* – which has been described as ‘a merging together of the earlier Dictionary with Burchfield’s four volumes of Supplement’ – not only chronicles a decline of modern philology in the twentieth century but also anticipates a new philological movement in the twenty-first (Brewer 2007, p. 11). Because of the sheer volume of work

words *linguistics* and *philology* have been used, respectively. Present usage is quite distinctly tending toward a differentiation of terms for the activities formerly combined under the one word *philology* ... This usage detracts in no way from the scope of the old usage of *philology*, and in addition introduces a precision desirable for the more highly specialized field’ (Pedersen 1931, p. viii). The third edition of the *OED* records the early usage of Portuguese *filologia* and German *Philologie* and in so doing suggests the interconnectedness of cognates in modern European languages.

<sup>6</sup> Benjamin 1994, pp. 175–6, and Benjamin 1995–2000, II: 136–7 (italics in the original); see also Lerer 1996).

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on philology that has appeared since the last decade of the twentieth century, I shall here direct my attention mainly to two of the earliest publications in this movement. Both are collections of essays that appeared in 1990. The first one is a set of articles printed in the special issue of the medieval journal *Speculum* under the title 'The New Philology'. This publication provoked immediate response both from those who were bewildered by its newness, and from those who saw in it a potential for an alternative approach to the study of medieval language and literature (e.g. Busby 1993 and Paden 1994).

This award-winning issue by and large contemplated new directions by re-examining the established methods of study in the field. In their efforts to break away from whatever was conceived as old philology, the contributors generally took one of two options that were opposite in temporal directionality, but which were by no means mutually exclusive (see Nichols 1990). One was to reconsider philology in the light of two areas of language studies that emerged during the twentieth century, namely, linguistics and literary theory with linguistic orientation. The other was to advocate a return to an earlier practice of philology, wherever this point of origin might be located. Contributors who identified the old philology as that of the Renaissance argued for the incompatibility of modern philology with pre-modern texts that had been produced before the invention of the printing press. In their opinion, manuscripts represented texts that were neither fixed nor definitive, because they were artefacts of an oral-based culture in which 'writing was dictated and reading was carried out viva voce' (Fleischman 1990, p. 20). After the Renaissance, they argued, philologists regarded texts as written material permanently set in print. These philologists included humanists who were preoccupied with assembling works of antiquity in order to reproduce classical literature in printed form; editors from nineteenth-century Germany, who in their romantic idealism arranged extant manuscripts of medieval texts in orderly stemmata and placed reconstructed *Urtexts* at the top; and even twentieth-century textual critics who, following the French tradition, deemed the editing of pre-modern texts synonymous with printing what they considered the best version, while listing 'variants' on the bottom of each page as an apparatus (see Nichols 1990, pp. 2–7, and Fleischman 1990, pp. 20 and 25–7; cf. Cerquiglini 1999).

The *Speculum* edition of the 'New Philology' frequently appealed to the idea of origin as in 'a return to the manuscripts, not merely as sources of editions, but as "the original texts"' (Fleischman 1990, p. 25). Given the fact that the history of philology goes back to antiquity, any call for a return to the origin of philology should be understood only in the relativity of time (see R. H. Bloch 1990, p. 38). It is nonetheless suggestive that one of the earliest attempts to reconsider philology in the late twentieth century was made by specialists in the Middle Ages, a period that was, to quote one of the contributors, rejected by the moderns as 'a millennium of middleness,



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a space that serves simply to hold apart the first beginning of antiquity and the Renaissance rebeginning' (Patterson 1990, p. 92). The 'New Philology' issue was therefore effective especially when it questioned 'the gigantic master narrative by which modernity identifies itself with the Renaissance and rejects the Middle Ages as by definition premodern'. From a medievalist viewpoint, this 'pervasive and apparently ineradicable *grand récit* that organizes Western cultural history' is no more than a narrative invented and reinscribed by self-confident modern men, of whom Petrarch may well have been the first (*ibid.*; cf. Robinson 1984 and Mommsen 1942).

Another collaborative attempt to rethink philology was made in the field of literary studies at large. In 1990, the journal *Comparative Literature Studies* published a special-focus issue entitled 'What Is Philology?'<sup>7</sup> The pieces included in this collection were based on a conference held two years earlier at Harvard University under the aegis of the Center for Literary and Cultural Studies. The participants specialized in many different periods and language groups, and their opinions – which, too, were often polarized between text and theory – showed how diverse the practice of philology could be. One panel member maintained that philology's 'quest for facts and truths about literary texts' should point to 'a separation of literature and criticism, as being distinct in kind and therefore beyond competition' (Thomas 1990, p. 69). Another argued, echoing Paul de Man, that 'what is truly radical in theory *is* philology' (Johnson 1990, p. 29 (*italics in the original*); cf. de Man 1986b). One talk began with the premise that 'philology is the basis of literary criticism', whereas another ended with the assertion that 'the notion of philology as a basis which is somehow prior to literary and cultural interpretation is an idea that one should seriously question' (Clausen 1990, p. 13, and Culler 1990, p. 52). One speaker detected a crisis of philology already in 406 BCE, when the deaths of schoolboys under a collapsed roof in the community of Chios was interpreted as an omen presaging not only a political disaster in the region but also the narrowing of the scope of philology to written texts and hence to *grammata* ('letters') (Nagy 1990). But another speaker contended that we had only to look to the philology of the early nineteenth century to set Lady Philology free from the tedious and perverse job of teaching anxiety-ridden English graduate students at Harvard and elsewhere how to translate Gothic with the aid of a grammar written in German.<sup>8</sup> The conference 'What is Philology?' generated almost as many answers to its title question as the number of the participants, because, to quote its organizer Jan Ziolkowski, this 'debate over the place of philology in the curriculum was presented unabashedly as a power struggle' (Ziolkowski 1990b, p. 9).

<sup>7</sup> Volume 27, number 1. The proceedings were reissued in the same year as an independent volume under the title *On Philology* (Ziolkowski 1990a); all citations are taken from this edition.

<sup>8</sup> Simon 1990. This sketch of graduate pedagogy is based on Bate 1982, p. 49.

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If seen strictly as a medium for power, philology might be given no more than ‘a relational identity’, to use Jonathan Culler’s expression, in that ‘it depends on what it is opposed to’. Hence ‘the question what is philology is the question of what are the relevant oppositions that divide, delimit, articulate the domain of P’s’, that is, the body of writing on language and literature, to which the letter P is assigned in the classification system of the Library of Congress.<sup>9</sup>

Culler called for philology once again in his 2002 essay entitled ‘The Return to Philology’. Taking its title as well as inspiration from de Man’s essay, Culler’s piece reconceives the domain of literature as philology’s double. Just as philology has the ability to cut across the boundaries of fields and subjects, literature is a discipline that is capable not only of combining the humanistic and the historical but also of relating itself ‘to theology in its hermeneutic task of determining the meaning of culturally important texts and to moral philosophy in its responsibility for a corpus of writing dealing with the deepest problems of human experience’ (Culler 2002, pp. 12–13). The expression ‘the return to philology’ was also used as a title for one of the chapters in Edward Said’s *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004). The chapter in question begins with a description of philology that is a dead ringer for Wyatt’s ‘Phil’: ‘Philology is just about’, writes Said, ‘the least with-it, least sexy, and most unmodern of any of the branches of learning associated with humanism’. However unmodern and unsexy it may be, philology is an integral part of Said’s own scholarly and cultural identity. As love of words, it comprises ‘a detailed, patient scrutiny of and a lifelong attentiveness to the words and rhetorics by which language is used by human beings who existed in history’. And ‘as a discipline it acquires a quasi-scientific intellectual and spiritual prestige at various periods in all of the major cultural traditions, including the Western and the Arabic-Islamic traditions that have framed my own development’ (Said 2004, pp. 57–8 and 61). In his view, the humanism of America today is in great need of philology, because

A true philological reading is active; it involves getting inside the process of language already going on in words and making it disclose what may be hidden or incomplete or masked or distorted in any text we may have before us. In this view of language, then, words are not passive markers or signifiers standing in unassumingly for a higher reality; they are, instead, an integral formative part of the reality itself. (*ibid.*, p. 59)

<sup>9</sup> Culler 1990, p. 49. Specialists in library science would be quick to tell us, in the voice of Saussure or Plato’s Hermogenes, that letters in call numbers are completely arbitrary. For ordinary users of research libraries, however, it is almost inevitable to make a connection between some letters in the call numbers and the subjects they signify: e.g. <G> for geography, <M> for music, <T> for technology and perhaps <R> for medicine. Even within the ‘domain of P’s’ (i.e. language and literature), PE stands for English language, and PD for German or Germanic language (*deutsch*).