Semantic Traces of Social Interaction from Antiquity to Early Modern Times

Semantic Traces of Social Interaction from Antiquity to Early Modern Times:

Historical Conversatio

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PREFACE

Tracing changes in the meaning of *conversatio* and its modern language derivatives, this book illustrates the productivity of historical semantic analysis for cultural studies. The starting point is the observation that the 17th-century concept of conversation, as developed by French theorists, is much closer to our current understanding of a sociable, engaging discussion than to the meaning of *conversatio* in Antiquity or the Middle Ages. The underlying question is, however, when and how did this semantic shift happen? It is, of course, well known that the original meaning of *conversatio* ('social interaction') increasingly conceded to the narrower meaning of conversation as 'talk', but no light has been shed on the meandering paths that led to this shift. The study at hand provides new insights into this history through an analysis of previously-ignored texts from Antiquity and the Middle Ages as well as from the Early Modern period (for example, Early New High German translations of Italian and French tracts, and bilingual and multilingual 15th- to 17th-century dictionaries). The study also shows that, even as late as the 17th century, the modern language derivatives of *conversatio* had a strong link to non-verbal body language.

The broad spectrum of meanings for the Medieval Latin word *conversatio* is surprising, in that it seems unconnected to both the semasiological field of current modern language forms of the word and to the results of research on 17th-century literature on the art of conversation. Admittedly, *conversatio* was already polysemous in the first centuries of the Common Era, as this study proves in its analysis of varying types of text. Very early on, one finds the meanings 'convivial intercourse' or 'eating together'.

Since Christian authors from late Antiquity had considerable influence on the religious literature of the Middle Ages, this book also takes a close look at their writings. In this text corpus, the meaning 'living', 'way of life', or 'manner of living' is dominant. From late Antiquity until the late Middle Ages, the focus of *conversatio* is the individual person, not interactions between people. However, in the tradition of the Aristotelian idea of the human being as *animal sociale*, from the 13th century onwards the meaning 'socializing with others', which includes spoken interaction, becomes more important.

Nevertheless, the semantic dominance of 'way of life' or 'behavior' was carried over from late Antiquity and the Middle Ages into 12th- to 16th-century French and Italian dialects. In Italian 16th-century courtesy books, a change can be observed for *conversazione* and *conversare*. The earlier spectrum of meaning increasingly gives way to the verbal aspect ('to talk with one another'), without, however, excluding the physical, non-verbal moment. Usually 'social intercourse' is meant, which includes talking together as the central element of frequenting one another, as confirmed by German 16th-century translations of Italian courtesy books.

The shift that took place in 17th-century French literature is examined in a detailed look at different types of texts (grammars, rhetorics, books on education, novels), beginning with the onset of the century. As of the 1650s, the primary meaning of *conversation* became 'talk' or 'discussion'. As this survey shows in detail, as the 17th century progressed, the semasiological field of *conversation* increasingly narrowed to mean 'social verbal exchange' (as opposed to other kinds of talks).

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The scene is set in the drawing room of the Altenwyls, an aristocratic family. After some banter about the pervasive salon culture of the times, the characters begin to discuss the intent and purpose of conversation. Asked for her opinion, Countess Helene announces that little is more horrible than conversation, consisting as it does of nothing but "words that flatten everything real under a dead layer of soothing prattle."[1] Count Altenwyl concurs; he believes the art of conversation to have been lost: It is not the ability to pour words out of oneself like a waterfall, but the talent of prompting one's guest. Under this definition he claims, nowadays "no one understands how to make conversation or how to keep silent." Shortly thereafter, he adds: "In my time […] [w]e thought highly of a witty repartee: we used to lay ourselves out to be brilliant." Edine, a friend of the Countess, replies: "When I make conversation, I want to be taken out of myself. I want to get away from the everyday round." Count Hans Karl Bühl, still musing on an earlier point, asserts that juggling and balancing acts need more intelligence than most conversations. Altenwyl decries the "businesslike tone" of the day. Directness and purpose dominate speech, even between men and women, which Edine attributes to the fact that people no longer read enough and fail to "cultivate their minds."

Listening to the characters in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's comedy *The Difficult Man* talking—rather self-reflexively—about the correct art of conversation gives us a glimpse into the role still played by conversation in early 20th century Viennese salon culture. Numerous elements of and arguments within the discussion held by the company in Hofmannsthal's play were already common in French salons 200 years earlier, as those familiar with late 17th-century salon literature can attest. Even at that time, people in salons discussed the right way of conversing with one another. Should serious topics be at the center of conversation or breezy entertain-

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[1] All citations from Hugo von Hofmannsthal's play *The Difficult Man*, Act II, Scene 1 (Hofmannsthal 2008 [1921], p. 269-275). 'Syrup' in Muir's translation changed to 'prattle' (*Geschwätz*).

ment? How does one change conversational partners? What should one talk or not talk about? What are the characteristics of the ideal conversationalist? These and similar questions are not only dealt with in numerous tracts and books on etiquette, but are also mirrored in model conversations published either as collections or embedded in literary texts.[2]

Antoine Gombauld, one of the most important 17th-century theorists of conversation—and better known as the Chevalier de Méré—defines *conversation* as follows:

> The greatest use of words among worldly people is in conversation [...]. I call Conversation all those talks (*entretiens*) between all sorts of people who are communicating one with the other, whether they have met by chance and have no more to say to one another than two or three words, whether one has gone on a walk or even a journey with friends—or even with people one does not know, whether one finds oneself at a table with people from fine society, whether one has gone to see people that one loves, and that is where one finds the most agreeable communication, whether one has finally gone to some meeting place where one thinks of nothing but diversion, which in effect is the main aim of talks (*entretiens*). For when one meets to deliberate or to conduct affairs one calls it counsel (*conseil*) and conference (*conférence*) where ordinarily one may neither laugh nor jest.

> *Le plus grand usage de la parole parmi les personnes du monde, c'est la conversation […]. J'appelle Conversation, tous les entretiens qu'ont toutes sortes de gens, qui se communiquent les uns aux autres, soit qu'on se rencontre par hasard, et qu'on n'ait que deux ou trois mots à se dire; soit qu'on se promène, ou qu'on voyage avec ses amis, ou même avec des personnes qu'on ne connaît pas; soit qu'on se trouve à table avec des gens de bonne compagnie, soit qu'on aille voir des personnes qu'on aime, et c'est où l'on se communique le plus agréablement; soit enfin qu'on se rendre en quelque lieu d'assemblée, où l'on ne pense qu'à se divertir, comme en effet, c'est le principal but des entretiens. Car quand on s'assemble pour délibérer, ou pour traiter d'affaires, cela s'appelle Conseil et Conférence, où d'ordinaire il ne faut ni rire ni badiner.*[3]

This definition, published by Méré in his 1677 discourse *De la conversation,* is largely compatible with our current understanding of the term: an

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[2] On this see, e.g., Dens 1973; Strosetzki 1978; Goldsmith 1988; Bray and Strosetzki 1995; Fumaroli 1996; Craveri 2001; Godo 2015. Key primary texts can be found in Hellegouarc'h 1997.

[3] Chevalier de Méré 1930 [1677], vol. 2, p. 102f. All translations by Laura Radosh unless otherwise noted.

informal, sociable talk held mostly to while away the time and to make time spent in company more enjoyable. These are, in general, the associations we have today with the word 'conversation', despite the disparaging connotation of 'making conversation', deemed superficial in both English and German.[4]

But, in fact, the congruence of Méré's definition with the current meaning of the word obscures the semantic distance between the Latin lexeme *conversatio* and conversation as sociable talk. Particular preconditions were necessary to link the word with the specific concept of talking together that Méré describes in his discourse. Looking at the use of *conversatio* and its modern language equivalents only 50 years earlier, it is astonishing that Méré chose the lexeme *conversation* at all to denote sociable talk. Or, put another way, against the background of the semantic history of the word, it becomes clear that Méré was intentionally making a semasiological mark when he called such talks *conversations*.

Today, the literature is generally in agreement that the modern language derivatives of *conversatio* underwent a decisive semantic shift in the 17th century. Thereafter the meaning—adopted from the Latin—narrowed from 'being somewhere (together)', 'living together' or 'interacting with' to refer only to 'verbal interaction' or a 'talk' held with others.[5] It is equally undisputed that the Latin word *conversatio* and its modern equivalents are used in numerous 17th-century texts as key termini for characterizing specific (and quite different, depending on the context) forms of human interaction. Concepts of conversation played such an important role, especially in late 17th- and early 18th-century French literature, that the relevant research sometimes refers to this period as *l'âge de la conversation.*[6] Yet the fact that the meaning of the word *conversation* changes in this 'age of conversation' raises questions about the conditions and reasons for this shift in meaning. Where, when, how, and, most importantly, why did the semantics of the modern lexemes derived from *conversatio* shift?

To answer this question, in the following, the semantic development of the Latin word *conversatio* and its modern language derivatives is delineated.[7] The question is how the meanings of the word *conversatio* changed

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[4] The Oxford Dictionary of English defines the phrase "make conversation" as "talk for the sake of politeness without having anything to say" (*Oxford Dictionary of English* 1998, s.v. 'conversation', p. 378).

[5] See for example Strosetzki 1978; Schmölders 1979; Ehler 1996, p. 13-16.

[6] See for example Fumaroli 1995; Craveri 2002.

[7] The semantic developments of the derivatives of *conversatio* in Spanish and English were not examined in the same depth as in Italian and French. However, in general it can be said that the history of the semasiological fields of the English

over the centuries, and in which sorts of texts and discourses, argumenta-
tions and languages we can trace those changes. This historical study of
the word allows us to pinpoint not only the conditions of, but in part also
the reasons for the semantic shift, bringing in elements of social history
and the history of mentalities.

As the transdisciplinary method of historical semantics has shown over
the past 30 years using varying research approaches, changes in social
structure and thought are mirrored in semantic shifts. Conceptual history,
lexicometry, socio-historical discourse semantics—there are many meth-
ods that use historical semantic analyses as the central key to unlocking an
understanding of past epochs, concepts in the humanities, and socio-
historical events. As diverse as these approaches are, stemming as they do
from varying academic traditions, together they have proven that language
is more than just a passive medium to convey meaning.[8]

Words and their meanings on the one hand, and the changes in those
meanings on the other, influence socio-cultural structures, orders of
knowledge, ideologies, and mentalities. In turn, socio-political achieve-
ments, ideological orientation, novel ways of thinking, and modifications
of scientific knowledge and cultural practices inform and change the way
words are used, leading to neologisms and semantic shifts as well as to
expanded or narrowed meanings. This reciprocity holds true not only for
the social history of the late 18th century, where the usefulness of histori-
cal semantic methods for the advancement of knowledge has clearly been
shown, but for the analysis of all systems of knowledge and communica-
tion.[9]

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and Spanish variations of the word concurs completely—with minor temporal
differences—with that of the French and Italian words.
[8] See Reichardt 1998, p. 21.
[9] On the 18th century see for example Brunner 1972-1997; Reichardt and Lüse-
brink 1985-88; Furet and Ozouf 1988; Schneiders 1995; Ferrone and Roche 1997;
Delon 1997.

CHAPTER II

CONVERSATIO AS COMMUNAL TOGETHERNESS

Even the etymology of *con-versatio* references the heart of (human) life: living and staying (with one another), from *cum* and *versari*. But this compound does not necessarily, as has often been suggested, mean that the semantic field must be in the area of interacting or of keeping company with and socializing with others. The prefix *cum-* (Old Latin *com-*) has two different meanings. On the one hand, it can simply intensify *versatio* or *versari*, the primary meaning of which describes a turning movement and came to mean 'to tarry', 'to live' or 'to dwell'.[1] On the other hand, it can mean 'together with', denoting something is common or joint and thus a sociable element.[2] So when in the Early Modern period the meanings of the derivatives of *conversatio* shifted towards sociable talk, and in French *conversation* even became a key term for the concept of talking together, this semantic shift mirrored the value of this concept for a particular society or group. Someone who denotes a sociable talk as 'conversation' (French), 'conversazione' (Italian) or 'conversation' (English) sees verbal interaction as the heart of human togetherness.

One difficulty faced by historical studies of a word, such as the present study, is that during the decisive phase of semantic change, it is often quite difficult to determine the semantic direction of the word—even at the sites of its occurrence in the French and Italian texts. This difficulty was met in two ways. First, Early New High German translations of key texts were also consulted for the analysis. The German translations provide a particularly good foil, because nuances of meaning could more easily be pinpointed. Unlike in French, Italian, and English, the lexeme *Conversation* did not enter German until the 16th century, and then only haltingly and as a foreign word. In the phase during which the semantic shift took place, the word had not yet been established in the target language and was therefore often not chosen in the translation. Adducing these translations clarifies when the translator felt the Italian or French use of the word in a par-

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[1] See Hoppenbrouwers 1964, p. 48-49.
[2] Ibid.

ticular context was problematic and therefore diverged from the more tra-
ditional translation or even used two words at once. Second, this study not
only analyzes the use of the word in narratives and tracts, but also focuses
on bilingual and multilingual dictionaries of the time. Integrating diction-
aries into the analysis gives yet another perspective and provides new as-
pects to examine in an attempt to complement and corroborate findings.

CHAPTER III

THE BROAD SPECTRUM OF MEANING
IN THE MIDDLE AGES

To pinpoint key semantic changes of a lexeme, exact observation of its fields of meaning in the course of history is necessary. Since the shift of meaning of the French *conversation,* seen so clearly in 17th-century salon culture, has its precursors in the 16th-century Italian courtesy books, it is necessary to look back further than one or two centuries to delineate the semasiological field. An analysis of the use of *conversatio* (Latin) in the Middle Ages enables us to grasp the later shift of meaning. The Latin lexeme provides a basis for comparison *before* its modern language equivalents. This approach is also suggested by the relatively late entry of the word into French and Italian—and the fact that at the beginning, its use mirrored that of the Latin word almost exactly, as we shall see.

Helpful in delineating the semasiological field of *conversatio* in the Middle Ages is the comprehensive *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch,* a dictionary of Medieval Latin created by evaluating around 3000 works and collections. This dictionary includes not only many references, but also a broad spectrum of the different types of text comprising Medieval Latin literature.[1] The results given for the lemma *conversatio* may seem surprising, considering both the modern semantic field and the shift in meaning attested by the literature from 'community', 'living together' or 'association' to 'talk'.

Under the label *spectat ad homines,* and with the reference *de vita agenda eiusque modis et normis,* the following interpretamenta are given by the dictionary for the primary sememe of *conversatio*: *vita*, *ratio (vivendi)*—'life', 'lifestyle', 'way or form of life'.[2] This sememe is broken down into the following nuanced units of meaning: 1) unspecified use in the sense of the above-mentioned interpretamenta; 2) *vita terrena*, *exsilium*—'earthly existence', 'earthly pilgrimage'; 3) *mores*, *indoles*—'manner

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[1] *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, Abkürzungs- und Quellenverzeichnisse (1959), p. 3.

[2] *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (1999), col. 1824.

(of being)', 'character'; 4) *modus se gerendi, apparendi*—'manner of act-ing', 'appearance'.[3] A second sememe under the same gloss gives the in-terpretamentum *victus*—'sustenance'.[4]

Only under the second gloss, *de commercio, convictu*, does the *Mittel-lateinisches Wörterbuch* list the meanings we would have first expected: 1) *consuetudo, societas*—'intercourse', 'association', 'society'; 2) *com-munio, consortium*—'community'.[5] Referring to the latter meaning, the dictionary also gives *cohabitatio (coenobialis)*—'(monastic) cohabitation' and remarks on the metonymic use in the sense of *congregatio, conven-tus*—'congregation', 'convent'.[6]

Alongside these sememes, however, *conversatio* has further meanings in the literature of the Middle Ages. Under the label *de mansione, statione*, the *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch* lists the interpretamentum *commora-tio*—'sojourn'; under *de actione, intentione* it lists *studium, exercitatio*—'exertion', 'endeavor', 'exercise', and under *usus, mos*—'practice', 'cus-tom'.[7] In referring not to people, but *spectat ad res*, *conversatio* can have the sense of *condicio, status*—'condition', 'state' and, used in the plural, also *vicissitudines, casus*—'vicissitudes'.[8]

This plethora of meanings is astonishing, as nothing points toward it in either today's semasiological field of the modern equivalents or in the re-search on 17th-century literature on the art of conversation. As can be seen in the citations given, *conversatio* is a Medieval Latin lexeme found most-ly in chronicles, biographies, descriptions of traditions and customs, and official documents—unsurprising in light of its broad spectrum of mean-ings, since it revolves around human behavior and coexistence. It should also be noted that all of the above sememes of *conversatio* can be found within these different text types and often even different sememes in one and the same text.

A comparison with the verb *conversari* illustrates a situation similar to that of the noun. The *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch* describes the most important sememe of this verb with the interpretamenta *versari, morari, habitare, vivere*—'to stay', 'to reside' 'to linger', 'to live',[9] and in special cases *occupari, operam dare*—'to be occupied (with)', 'to concentrate

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (1999), col.n 1824/25.

[6] *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (1999), col. 1825.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid. In addition to the meanings listed here, in the Middle Ages *conversio* was used synonymously with *conversatio*.

[9] *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (1999), col. 1829.

on'.[10] A second sememe is glossed with *commorari*, *consuetudinem*, *commercium habere (cum)*—'to be together', 'to have intercourse with', 'to have commerce with'.[11] Neither is there much difference between noun and verb as regards the types of texts and arguments in which *conversari* is found.

The broad spectrum of meaning in the Middle Ages, in which parts of the semasiological field are far from the meanings we would expect for the word, raises the question of the genesis of the field of meaning in Medieval Latin. We shall attempt to answer this question, particularly as it can tell us something about the development of this semasiological field in the Early Modern period.

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[10] *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (1999), col. 1830.

[11] *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2 (1999), col. 1830. For greater differentiation of further meanings see col.n 1830/1831.

CHAPTER IV

FIRST TRACES IN CLASSICAL LATIN

Two sources are particularly helpful in delineating the semasiological field of *conversatio* in Classical Latin. First, the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae,* which demarcates the object of study based on the established standards of modern lexicography, provides a qualitative and nuanced picture of the field of meaning.[1] Computer technology, such as the digitalized *Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina (BTL)*, is also key.[2] The latter is a corpus of all extant Classical Latin literature from its beginnings to the end of the second century CE, as well as works by important authors of Late Antiquity.

We should, however, remember that neither of these aids can give a full picture of how the word *conversatio* was used at the time (in written language around the first century CE). Even a complete list of all extant references would only draw from the small sample left to us of the language of the time, so that any description of its semantic field is necessarily fragmentary. While the *Thesaurus* entry for the lemma *conversatio* gives a semantic categorization of all references (without providing all citations the entry is based on), a full-text search of the digitalized *Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina* provides links to every recorded use, which, however, must be interpreted to delineate the semasiological field.

A careful analysis of the *Thesaurus* entry for *conversatio* uncovers two remarkable facts. First, there are no citations for the word before the Common Era[3]—which a search within the *BTL* confirms. Second, the entry provides three different semantic subfields for *conversatio*, but only one of those fields dates back to the first century CE, and the citations for the remaining two fields are almost all by Christian authors. The field in which the oldest examples of the word are found includes the interpreta-

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[1] *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, vol. 4 (1905), col.n 850-853. See also the extensive study by H. Hoppenbrouwers that emerged within the Benedictine discussion of *conversatio* (see below) and interprets this *Thesaurus* entry (Hoppenbrouwers 1964).

[2] *Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina* (2009). On the chances and advantages of computer-assisted lexicology, see Wolf 1998, p. 637-639.

[3] The only first century BCE citation is from Vitruvius, *De architectura* 9, 1, 4, which, however, must be considered corrupt.

menta *commoratio, convictus, societas conversantium, familiaritas:* a) *proprie* and b) *commercium, usus.*[4] The English translations and thus meanings for the semasiological field of *conversatio* in the first century CE are as follows: 'stay (at a place)', 'abode', 'living together (convivially)', 'social interaction', 'company at the table (eating together)', 'familiar intercourse', 'familiarity'.

A full-text search in the *BTL* reveals that there are only around three dozen citations of the word *conversatio* in the first century CE, all of which are by only a handful of authors. Most citations are from the philosophical writings of Seneca the Younger.[5] In addition, *conversatio* is found in works by Frontinus,[6] Plinius the Elder,[7] Quintilian,[8] Seneca the Elder,[9] Tacitus,[10] and Velleius Paterculus.[11] It is no coincidence that Seneca was among the first to use the word *conversatio*, as his works are primarily concerned with issues of practical philosophy, in particular social and individual ethics. He uses this word to describe aspects of private dealings and association. *Conversatio* thus takes a seat alongside *convictus*, already used by Cicero, which has some similar semantic characteristics.

All sources that cite the word in the first century CE are part of a scientific discourse. *Conversatio* occurs in texts on, alongside philosophy, rhetoric, history, and natural history. All of the sources are prose texts that explain theoretical knowledge in the broadest sense. The texts' envisioned audience is students or other learners.

The key result of a closer inspection of the references in their respective contexts is that all citations can be attributed to social variants of the word. In the language of the first century CE, the newly-coined word clearly seems to have denoted social—in the original meaning of the

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[4] *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, vol. 4 (1905), col.n 850-852.

[5] In Seneca's philosophical writings, *conversatio* is found 19 times in total in the following places: *Consolatio ad Helviam* (= dial. 12) 7, 9; 15, 2; *Consolatio ad Marciam* (= dial. 6) 23, 1; *Consolatio ad Polybium* (= dial. 11) 17, 4; *De beneficiis* 3, 2, 3; 6, 29, 2; *De brevitate vitae* (= dial. 7) 3, 3; *De tranquilitate animi* (= dial. 9) 1, 3; 3, 7; 17, 3; *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* 7, 2; 35, 3; 47, 15; 94, 40; 94, 41; 99, 19; 100, 12; *Naturales quaestiones* 2, 32, 5; 3, praefatio, 11.

[6] Sextus Iulius Frontinus, *Strategemata* 2, 4, 10.

[7] Plinius maior, *Naturalis historia* 9, 26; 10, 100.

[8] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1, 2, 4; 6, 3, 17. Also: *Declamationes XIX maiores* 1, 15; 15, 4; 18, 7; *Declamationes minores* 266, 7; 298, 1 (these works have been attributed to Quintilian).

[9] *Senecae rhetoris controversiarum excerpta* 6, 8.

[10] Tacitus, *Annales* 12, 49, 1; *Dialogus de oratoribus* 9, 5; *Germania* 40, 3.

[11] Velleius Paterculus, *Historiae Romanae* 2, 102, 3.

word—aspects of life. The moment of common association of the community is inherent to the entire semasiological field. Specifically, it is possible to differentiate between the following sememes and semes:

1) A first category of citations can be grouped together in which 'association', 'being together' or 'tarrying' in the broadest sense are the meanings of *conversatio*.[12] Often, there is an emphasis on the meeting of two different types of existences, such as gods and humans, women and men, animals and humans, or the souls of the dead and those of the living:

> Besides the fact that everything that is future is uncertain, and the only certainty is that it is more likely to turn out ill than well, our spirits find the path to the gods above easiest when they are soon allowed to leave the society *(conversatio)* of mankind, because they have then contracted fewest impurities to weigh them down.

> *Praeter hoc, quod omne futurum incertum est et ad deteriora certius, facillimum ad superos iter est animis cito ab humana conversatione dimissis: minimum enim faecis pondus traxerunt.*[13]

2) In a second cluster, we can group those citations that also have the sememe 'association' or 'intercourse', but with the additional semantic feature of spoken interaction having an effect upon behavior, conduct or customs—that is to say there is a moral aspect inherent to the meaning:

> To consort *(conversatio)* with the crowd is harmful; there is no person who does not make some vice attractive to us, or stamp it upon us, or taint us unconsciously therewith.

> *Inimica est multorum conversatio: nemo non aliquod nobis vitium aut commendat aut inprimit aut nescientibus adlinit.*[14]

3) The third group includes those citations that use *conversatio* in the meaning of 'intercourse with people' and 'social gathering' in contrast to *solitudo*:

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[12] Compare Plin. nat. 10, 100; Sen. dial. 10, 3, 3; Sen. epist. 100, 12.

[13] Sen. dial. 6, 23, 1 (English: Seneca 1900). Further examples: Sen. contr. ex. 6, 8; Plin. nat. 9, 26; Sen. nat. 3, praef. 11; Sen. nat. 2, 32, 5; Tac. Germ. 40, 3.

[14] Sen. epist. 7, 2 (English: Seneca 1925, vol. 1). Further examples: Quint. inst. 1, 2, 4; Sen. dial. 9, 1, 3; Sen. epist. 47, 15; Sen. epist. 94, 40; Sen. epist. 94, 41; Tac. ann. 12, 49, 1.

But if we give up all society *(conversatio)*, turn our backs upon the whole human race, and live communing with ourselves alone, this solitude without any interesting occupation will lead to a want of something to do.

Nam, si omnem conversationem tollimus et generi humano renuntiamus vivimusque in nos tantum conversi, sequetur hanc solitudinem omni studio carentem inopia rerum agendarum.[15]

4) In a fourth group of citations, *conversatio* is directly related to *conspectus*, bringing to the fore the possibility of eye contact, which initiates tarrying and associating with one another:

We feel a joy over those whom we love, even when separated from them, but such a joy is light and fleeting: the sight of a man, and his presence, and communion *(conversatio)* with him, afford something of living pleasure; this is true, at any rate, if one not only sees the man one desires, but the sort of man one desires.

Venit ad nos ex is, quos amamus, etiam absentibus gaudium, sed it leve et evanidum: conspectus et praesentia et conversatio habet aliquid vivae voluptatis, utique si non tantum quem velis, sed qualem velis, videas.[16]

Apart from these first four meanings, from the very beginning there have been semes that stress those semantic features of *conversatio* that have to do with talking or language:

5) Thus, a fifth meaning can be circumscribed as joint 'intercourse', 'interaction' or 'sociable converse' between people from different geographical areas, which has an effect on their language (skills). 'Intercourse' is here understood in the general sense of 'being together', 'having contact' or 'association':

Later the Ligurians crossed into the island, and the Spaniards also came, as the similarity of customs shows; for the islanders wear the same head-coverings and the same kind of foot-gear as the Cantabrians, and certain of their words are the same; but only a few, for from intercourse *(conversatio)*

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[15] Sen. dial. 9, 3, 7 (English: Seneca 1900). Further examples: Sen. dial. 9, 17, 3 (here moral components are also found); Tac. dial. 9, 6. It should be noted here that the antithesis of *conversatio* and *solitudo* gained central importance in the 16th century, in particularly in Stefano Guazzo's work (see below).

[16] Sen. epist. 35, 3 (English: Seneca 1925, vol. 1). Further examples: Sen. dial. 11, 17, 4; Sen. benef. 3, 2, 3.

with the Greeks and Ligurians their language as a whole (*totus sermo*) has lost its native character.

Transierunt deinde Ligures in eam [i.e. Corsicam], transierunt et Hispani, quod ex similitudine ritus apparet: eadem enim tegimenta capitum idemque genus calceamenti quod Cantabris est, et verba quaedam (nam totus sermo conversatione Graecorum Ligurumque a patrio descivit).[17]

6) In the same context as *conversatio*, and exhibiting a parallel construction, many of the citations also use the word *sermo* or the word *convictus* or both. This raises the question of whether that makes it more difficult to delineate the semasiological field. Understanding the enumerations as either additive or contrasting changes the result. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that, as early as the first century CE, part of the semantic field of *conversatio* included 'talk' or 'discussion', if perhaps only on the outskirts of the onomasiological field. For example:

How many ways there are by which we may repay whatever we owe even to the well-to-do! – loyal advice, constant intercourse (*conversatio*), polite conversation (*sermo*) that pleases without flattery, attentive ears if he should wish to ask counsel, safe ears if he should wish to be confidential, and friendly intimacy (*convictus*).

Quam multa sunt, per quae, quidquid debemus, reddere etiam felicibus possumus! fidele consilium, adsidua conversatio, sermo comis et sine adulatione iucundus, aures, si deliberari velit, diligentes, tutae, si credere, convictus familiaritas.[18]

Or:

Tears like these fall by a forcing-out process, against our will; but different are the tears which we allow to escape when we muse in memory upon those whom we have lost. And there is in them a certain sweet sadness when we remember the sound of a pleasant voice (*sermo*), a genial interaction (*conversatio*), and the busy duties of yore; at such a time the eyes are loosened, as it were, with joy.

Hae lacrimae per elisionem cadunt nolentibus nobis: aliae sunt quibus exitum damus cum memoria eorum quos amisimus, retractatur, et inest quid-

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[17] Sen. dial. 12, 7, 9 (English: Seneca 1932).
[18] Sen. benef. 6, 29, 2 (English: Seneca 1935).

dam dulce tristitiae cum occurrunt sermones eorum iucundi, conversatio hilaris, officiosa pietas: tunc oculi velut in gaudio relaxantur.[19]

A comparison with the verb *conversari* confirms this analysis. Moreover, the verb seems to have emerged in the first century CE—the earliest citation is from Seneca the Elder—and is found mostly in philosophical texts dealing with questions of living together. The verb's sememes and semes are also analogous to that of the noun and are within the same spectrum of nuances of meaning.

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[19] Sen. epist. 99, 19 (English with modifications: Seneca 1925, vol. 3). Another example is: Sen. dial. 12, 15, 2: "You add to all this the actual scenes of our rejoicings and intercourse (*convictus*) and the reminders of our recent association (*conversatio*), which are, necessarily, the most potent causes of mental distress." – *Adicis istis loca ipsa gratulationum et convictuum et, ut necesse est, efficacissimas ad vexandos animos recentis conversationis notas* (English: Seneca 1932).

CHAPTER V

EXPANSION OF THE SEMASIOLOGICAL FIELD IN LATE ANTIQUITY

As has been noted, the semantic field circumscribed above covers only a part of the semasiological field of *conversatio* as delineated by the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* for the extant classical literature. The entry for the lemma *conversatio* contains two further domains of meaning. However—as becomes clear only after tracking the citations—these do not appear before the end of the second century CE. We can therefore speak of a polysemization of the word that took place in late Antiquity. The *Thesaurus* circumscribes these parts of the semantic field as follows: 2) *i. q. ratio agendi, vivendi, mores, consuetudo, condicio, status*, or 'way of life', 'life', 'behavior', 'more', 'convention', 'condition' or 'status', and 3) *i. q. observatio, studium, exercitatio, disciplina*, 'observance', 'exertion', 'endeavor', 'exercise' or 'regulation'.[1] It is notable that the citations for these two fields of meaning are found almost exclusively in texts written by Christian authors that deal directly with the content and dissemination of Christian teachings.

One of the first authors to use *conversatio* in this manner is the early Christian theologian Tertullian, who wrote at the turn of the second to third century CE. A full-text search in the digitalized *Patrologia Latina* finds around seventy occurrences of the word *conversatio* in Tertullian's surviving works.[2] In an examination of the citations, it is conspicuous that the ecclesiastical author uses the word to mean very different things, but most instances can be described using the interpretamenta *ratio agendi, vivendi* or *mores*. In a few cases Tertullian does use *conversatio* in the sense of 'intercourse', 'community', 'association with one another', and even in a manner which activates the seme 'talking together' as part of human intercourse (but always with a clear link to the seme of 'behavior in line with Christian morals').[3] However, there are many more cases in

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[1] *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, vol. 4 (1905), col.n 852/853.
[2] See Patrologia Latina Database, http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk (accessed July 2016).
[3] See for example Tertullian, *De idololatria* 14 and 20.

> *Nolite, inquit, margaritas vestras porcis iactare, ne conculcent ea, et conversi vos quoque evertant. Margaritae vestrae sunt quotidianae conversationis insignia.*[7]

Conversatio is understood here as an intensification of *versatio*. Another explanation might be that *conversatio* is reduced to *versatio*: in late Latin, composita often take on the meaning of the simplex. The sememe of *conversatio* that was to become the most important for this word in Latin literature of the Middle Ages is thus not only found for the first time in Tertullian's works, but also in the majority of his surviving citations.

What we have seen for Tertullian is not particular to him, but is the rule for Christian authors in late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. For example, in the work of the church father Cyprian, who lived only shortly after Tertullian, a full text search of the *Patrologia Latina* provides more than forty instances of *conversatio*, most of which can be interpreted as '(correct) behavior' or '(moral) way of life' (or, with the addition of a negative adjective, the opposite thereof). Again, a few citations can serve as illustration:

> Now that is the will of God which Christ both did and taught. Humility in conduct (*conversatio*); stedfastness in faith; modesty in words; justice in deeds; mercifulness in works; discipline in morals.

> *Voluntas autem Dei est quam Christus et fecit et docuit. Humilitas in conversatione, stabilitas in fide, verecundia in verbis, in factis iustitia, in operibus misericordia, in moribus disciplina.*[8]

Or:

> Consider that we are standing under the eyes of God, that we are pursuing the course of our conduct (*conversatio*) and our life, with God Himself

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[7] Tertullian, *Ad uxorem* 2, 5 (English with modifications: Tetullian 1885, vol. 4). Further examples are: Tertullian, *De poenitentia* 9: "And thus *exomologesis* is a discipline for man's prostration and humiliation, enjoining a demeanor (*conversatio*) calculated to move mercy." – *Itaque Exomologesis prosternendi et humilificandi hominis disciplina est, conversationem iniungens misericordiae illicem* (English: Tertullian 1885, vol. 3); Tertullian, *De praescriptionibus adversus haereticos* 27: "Let them also remember those (churches), concerning whose faith and knowledge and way of life (*conversatio*) the apostle rejoices and gives thanks to God." – *Sed et illas recognoscant, de quarum fide et scientia et conversatione Apostolus gaudet, et Deo gratias agit* (English with modifications: Tertullian 1885, vol. 3).

[8] Cyprian, *De oratione Dominica* 15 (English with modifications: Cyprian 1885).

looking on and judging, that we may then at length be able to attain to the result of beholding Him, if we now delight Him who sees us, by our actions [...].

Cogita sub oculis Dei nos stare, spectante et iudicante ipso conversationis ac vitae nostrae curricula decurrere, pervenire nos tunc demum posse ut eum videre contingat, si ipsum nunc videntem delectemus actibus nostris [...].[9]

A similar use is found in Augustine's extensive works; the word *conversatio* appears almost four hundred times in the surviving texts. Augustine, whose thought was strongly influenced by Classical philosophy and literature due to his pagan educational background, uses the word in all senses circumscribed in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae,* making this church father's use of *conversatio* in some way analogous to that of Seneca.[10] In most of the citations, however, Augustine, like other Christian authors, used *conversatio* to mean 'life' or 'way of life' or '(correct) behavior' or 'behavior that adheres to Christian morals' as well as 'ethos' or 'manner of being'.[11] The focus, depending on the thrust of the text, is either on behavior within the human community, within the Christian community, or in relation to infidels—sometimes solely in relation to an individual person

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[9] Cyprian, *De zelo et livore* 18 (English with modifications: Cyprian 1885). Further examples are: Cyprian, *De unitate ecclesiae* 21: "But if one shall have subsequently been blameworthy and obnoxious; if he shall have wasted his confession by evil acts (*conversatio*); if he shall have stained his life by disgraceful foulness [...]." – *Ceterum, si culpabilis et detestabilis postmodum fuerit, si confessionem suam mala conversatione prodegerit, si vitam suam turpi foeditate maculaverit [...]*; Cyprian, *De zelo et livore* 14: "Vices and carnal sins must be trampled down, beloved brethren, and the corrupting plague of the earthly body must be trodden under foot with spiritual vigour, lest, while we are turned back again to the ways (*conversatio*) of the old man." – *Obterenda sunt, fratres dilectis–simi, vitia et peccata carnalia, et terreni corporis infesta labes spiritali vigore calcanda, ne, dum iterum ad veteris hominis conversationem revolvimur, lethalibus laqueis implicemur* (English with modifications: Cyprian 1885).

[10] The use of *conversatio* in the sense of 'interaction', bringing the word closer to the onomasiological field of 'talk' can for example be seen in Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* 4, 27. Further examples for the sememe 'interaction' include: Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10, 11; 16, 24; Augustine, *De ordine* 2, 8. *Conversatio* in the sense of 'community' is found for example in: Augustine, *De fide et operibus* 10; Augustine, *In Ioannis Evangelium tractatus* 64, 1.

[11] 'Life', meaning more 'place of life' than 'manner of life' is a meaning of *conversatio* that is found often in Augustine and that was influenced most by the Latin translation of Philip III, 20: *Nostra autem conversatio in coelis est.*