

## Semantic etymologizing and symbolic reference

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Chunking is a process without which no linguistic utterances can be understood. It allows us to discern meaningful units in a continuous flow of sounds, most notably words and morphemes, whose meanings are then joined up so as to get at the meaning of the utterance as a whole.

Yāska and others involved in semantic etymologizing don't stop chunking at the level of morphemes. They look for networks of meaning hiding below the surface, preferably at or below the level of morphemes.

Modern scholars do not agree with Yāska's approach. However, they too look for semantic networks that unite the meaningful elements of language. Words, they will point out, are symbols, which means that they do not only refer to "their" objects, but also to each other.

Both semantic etymologizing and symbolic reference situate words in webs. In semantic etymologizing, words are connected to other words through phonetic features; through these phonetic features denoted objects, too, are connected to each other. In symbolic reference, words are connected to other words through the system of indexical relations that link symbols to one another; through these relations between words things in the physical world — properties, objects, and relations — are related to each other. Both semantic etymologizing and symbolic reference aim to bring to light links between words, and through these, links between things in the world. Having said that much, the webs of semantic etymologizing and the web of symbolic reference are not the same, far from it. But both are webs. Both the adherents of semantic etymologizing and those of symbolic reference think that verbal utterances cannot be fully grasped without an understanding of the webs of which words are part. Is it possible that both, though in different ways, pursued similar goals? Clearly, both looked for the hidden aspects of language that give it meaning.