



## Till vs. Until: A Sign-Oriented Approach

Yishai Tobin

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

### I. Traditional/Neotraditional Approaches

The alternative linguistic signs *till/until* constitute a “classic” case of two forms (almost) universally considered to be synonyms which are probably (almost) always interchangeable save for diglossic or stylistic preferences of individual speakers and writers. In this paper I will question these traditional and neo-traditional assumptions and provide an alternative sign-oriented analysis based on the theoretical and methodological concepts of invariance, markedness, and distinctive feature analysis (Tobin 1990, 1993, 1994/1995). I will first summarize the various ways that *till* and *until* have been analyzed.

#### A. The synonyms/interchangeable approach

A quick look at a sample of major British and American dictionaries (e.g., *Longman*, *Oxford*, *Cassell's*, *Chambers*, *Collins Cobuild*) reveals that each form is usually listed (with its counterpart placed in parentheses), and categorized as to “part of speech”, and, therefore, explicitly and implicitly, *till* and *until* are seen as synonyms: “*till* (*also until*): prep. conj.” If any difference is mentioned between the two, it is usually stylistic or idiosyncratic in nature: *until* is “more formal” and/or “it is a matter of personal choice.” A cursory examination of thesauri (e.g., *Roget's Thesaurus*, *The Miriam Webster Thesaurus*) also reveals that they are listed together as synonyms, however, this time with a different part of speech: *till/until*, adverbs of time. Various handbooks of proper usage and/or grammar books representing various theoret-

ical approaches (e.g., Alexander 1991, Aesop 1985, Abate and Abate 1979, Frank 1972, Greenbaum and Whitcut 1988, Jespersen 1970, Leech and Swartik 1984, and Ward 1993) also consider these forms to be synonymous and interchangeable, this time, however, with fairly conflicting evaluations of their part of speech as well as their stylistic, diglossic, poetic, and idiosyncratic uses:

*TILL* and *Until*: These two words mean exactly the same. *TILL* is more common in conversational English; *UNTIL* is used in both conversation and formal styles. Swan (1980:611)

In all varieties of writing *till* and *until* are interchangeable both as prepositions (wait *till/until* tomorrow) and as conjunctions (Wait *till/until* they get here). (Ebbitt & Ebbitt 1979: 283)

*Till* is a synonym for *until*, probably less common in the written language than *until* is. *Till* often has a literary or poetic effect. (Frank 1972:36)

*Till* and *until* are synonyms, used in subordinating clauses or as prepositions. They are used idiosyncratically by various writers (Di Hall Cane and Doyle use *until* preferably or even exclusively, while Hardy seems to use *till* only. (Jespersen 1970)

*Till* is not distinguished in meaning from *until*... (Ward 1993: 314-315)

## B. The Negative Aspect of *un-til*

Other scholars such as Quirk (1978), Mittwoch (1977) and Karttunen (1974) distinguish between the two and classify *until* as a negation word (perhaps assuming *un-* as a negative prefix) associated either with negative predictions or as being outside the scope of the negative with conflicting views of the temporal implications of the above:

“Till/until occur as prepositions of time. *Until* specifies a terminal point with a positive and a commencement point with a negative prediction.” (Quirk 1978)

“I shall defend the position that the *until*-phrase in negative sentences with punctual verbs... is a durational adverbial outside the scope of the negative... [I] will provide

evidence against the commonly held view that *until* is a negative polarity item” (Mittwoch 1977: 410).

However, what is good for the *until* “goose” is also good for the *till* “gander” regarding negative prediction and scope as may be seen in the following sentence: “He won’t sleep *till/until* the sun rises” in which both are acceptable.

### C. Temporal analysis

Other scholars point out a difference between a specific or punctual *until* versus a durative *till* (differing with Mittwoch above) without explaining why this difference occurs:

*Until* indicates a time that stops at the beginning of another time. *Until* introduces a time phrase or a time clause which expresses a specific time, not duration. (Praninskas 1959)

Although the above statement may have descriptive validity, the question of what motivates this temporal distinction has not been answered.

### D. Word order analysis

Hornby (1961, 1978) mentions a preference for *until* in sentence-initial position: “*Until* is preferred at the beginning of a sentence.” (Hornby 1961: 103, 1978: 922).

Yet the above statement does not preclude initial position for *till* and does not explain why this preference is motivated, if at all. (An example of *till* in initial position is found in our corpus in *The Catcher in the Rye* (Salinger 1954: 91). In a recent e-mail discussion (*The Linguist List*, 5 August 1997) dealing with the alternative word orders of the phrases *not... until/Until ... not* the following hypotheses were presented:

Debora Berkley wrote:

1. When the “until” phrase is moved to the beginning of the sentence, it means that the event referred to in the “until” phrase was a dividing point between a time when something was not true and a time when the thing was or could be true...

Nick Caffrey wrote:

2. [...] By putting the “until x” first, an expectation is created that the following phrase will describe an imperfect process. e.g.:

3. Until nine, he didn’t lift his hand from the task.

4. Until six in the morning, she hung on for dear life.

In these examples, the expectation is that the process is terminated, i.e. the task ended, she ceased to hang on, at the specified time. These descriptive statements serve to support our analysis in section II.

## E. Diachronic analysis

A summary of the development of *till* into *until* and related forms for prosodic, euphonic, or pragmatic reasons (without ever mentioning a semantic distinction between them) has also been attested to:

*Till/until/’til*: The original English word was *till*; for metre, rhythm, euphony, emphasis or whatever reason, it acquired a variant, *until*, which was later in less formal contexts, contracted to *’til*. The form *’till* is not attested except as a misspelling of *’til* or *till*, *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Differences* (Urdang 1988)

Diachronic analyses are inherently interesting but do not explain the choice of one form over another in those periods of time when they both exist side by side in the language.

## II. Analysis

### A. *Process* versus *Result*

In this paper I will present an alternative analysis based on the concept of *Process* and *Result* in language (Tobin 1993) which will provide a semantic distinction between the forms *till* and *until* that will account for their non-

synonymy and explain their distribution. The postulation of the features *Process* and *Result* is based on the assumption that language may reflect two fundamental ways of viewing actions, states, or events, either as focusing on the (ongoing) *process* involved in the action, state, or event, or, alternatively, from the point of view of the *result* (outcome, endpoint, consequence, completion, destination, or telic, or teleological goal).

The features of *Process* and *Result* explain the semantic distinction between troublesome lexical pairs in a unified and systematic way. This alternative approach involves a semantic analysis based on the semiotic or sign-oriented notions of invariance, markedness, and distinctive feature theory (Tobin 1990, 1993, 1994/1995). My analysis of troublesome lexical pairs is based on the following six principles:

1. Both members of such pairs share a common semantic domain.
2. It is this shared domain which has allowed for the assumption that the forms are (at least closely) synonymous.
3. I maintain, however, that the members of the lexical pair not synonyms, but rather each possesses a single invariant meaning which distinguishes it from the other, and will motivate its distribution in the language.
4. These invariant meanings are in a marked/unmarked relationship revolving around the features of *Process* and *Result* which refer to alternative ways of perceiving actions, states, or events in the world.
5. This particular marked/unmarked relationship is an asymmetric one which may be stated here in the form of discourse instructions: (a) the marked (M) form makes a specific claim for the feature *Result*: i.e., an action, state, or event must be viewed from the point of view of result, goal, consequence, conclusion, destination, telic end-point, etc. which may be explicitly stated or implied. (b) the unmarked (U) form makes no specific claim or is neutral for the semantic feature *Result*: i.e., an action, state, or event may be viewed either from the point of view of a *Process* and/or a *Result* which may be explicitly stated or implied.
6. The feature *Result* has been chosen as the marked feature because it involves a more complex cognitive perception: an action, state, or event must

not be viewed in a partial or immediate manner, merely from its “outset” and/or during its performance or execution, but must be viewed in a holistic way which necessarily includes its *Result* (goal, consequence, conclusion, destination, telic end-point.)

Thus, the unmarked member of the pair making no specific claim to *Result*, is the more flexible, neutral, and open-ended of the two. It allows for any and all kinds of perceptions of actions, states, or events. The marked member of the pair, making a specific claim for *Result*, is reserved for those linguistic and situational contexts where an action, state, or event must be perceived resultatively: i.e., taking its result in the form of a goal, consequence, conclusion, destination, telic end-point, etc., into account.

In summary, this analysis is based on the assumption that the choice between these linguistic signs is not determined arbitrarily by a kind of rule, nor for reasons of style or register, but rather that the total non-random distribution of these signs in the language is directly motivated by the subtle semantic distinction that exists between them. This subtle semantic distinction is expressed in their marked versus unmarked invariant meanings which revolve around the features of *Process* and *Result*: i.e., alternative ways of perceiving actions, states, and events in the world.

Previous analyses of *Process* and *Result* (Tobin 1993) analyzed the following troublesome lexical verb pairs: *do* (U) versus *make* (M), *look* (U) versus *see* (M), *listen* (U) versus *hear* (M), *say* (U) versus *tell* (M), *speak* (U) versus *talk* (M), *begin* (U) versus *start* (M), *end* versus *start* (M), *shut* versus *close* (M) as well as other lexical verbs, parts of speech other than verbs, phrasal verbs and aspectuals; the role of the features *Process* and *Result* in grammaticalization (the development from lexicon to grammar) of specific verbs such as the auxiliary uses of the verbs: *do* (in interrogative, negative, and emphatic / imperative constructions, *be* versus *get* (in passive constructions), and *be* versus *have* (in progressive / continuous versus perfect tenses or aspects; as well as in lexicalization (the development from grammar to lexicon) of irregular verbs in English, irregular infinitives in Hebrew, and different form classes of infinitives in Spanish, French, and Italian.

In particular, Tobin (1993) presents analyses of how the same marked semantic feature *Result* which already was shown to be part of the lexicon also can become part of the grammar. Specifically, we trace the development of the troublesome lexical pairs *begin* versus *start* and *end* versus *finish* into aspectual verbs and extend this process of grammaticalization to the analysis of the verbs *do* and *be* (neutral or unmarked verbs *par excellence*) and *get* and

*have* (archetypical verbs marked for the distinctive feature *Result*) in their use as auxiliaries in the formation of different sentence modalities (negative, interrogative, emphatic / imperative for *do*) as well as in passive (*be* versus *get*) and progressive or continuous (*be*) versus perfect (*have*) constructions. Finally, I postulate how the same marked semantic feature *Result* may serve as a basis to explain what was previously thought of as phonologically motivated irregularities in certain verbs in English and defective triconsonantal (CCC) roots in Semitic languages, and present the feature as a means to explain irregular infinitive forms in Hebrew as well as the various form classes of infinitives in Spanish, French and Italian. Tobin (1994/1995) analyzes the following troublesome lexical pairs in Hebrew according to the same features *Process* and *Result*: *lomar* (U) vs. *lebagid* (M) = ‘to say/tell’, *lehamtin* (U) versus *lexakot* (M) = ‘to wait’, *laxzor* (U) versus *lasbuv* (M) = ‘to return’, *lebatxil* (U) versus *lehaxel* (M) = ‘to begin/start’, and *lesayem* (U) versus *ligmor* (M) = ‘to end/finish/complete’.

In the present analysis I claim that the sign *until* is marked for *Result* while the sign *till* is unmarked for *Process* and *Result*. According to this analysis, this troublesome, “synonymous” lexical pair shares a semantic domain of bringing entities to a spatial-temporal-existential boundary. *Untils* marked for *Result* = makes a specific claim for the feature *Result*: i.e., the result, goal, consequence, conclusion, destination, telic end-point, etc. is either stated explicitly or implied. *Tills* is unmarked for the feature *Result* = makes no specific claim or is neutral concerning the feature *Result*: i.e., either the process and/or the result may be stated explicitly or implied.

## B. *Chronos* versus *Kairos*

According to Kermode (1985:76) there are two ways that time is perceived and defined in Greek:

- (a) *Chronos*, which indicates the “passing of time” or “waiting time,” i.e. duration;
- (b) *Kairos*, which indicates “a point in time filled with a significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end.”

If we view these two temporal notions as semantic features, and postulate that *Kairos*, the more cognitively complex of the two, is the marked feature, and then apply these features to the signs *till* and *until*, we can further

expand our analysis as follows: the sign *until* marked for *Result* is also marked for the temporal feature *Kairos* while the sign *till* unmarked for *Process/Result* is also unmarked for the temporal features *Chronos / Kairos*.

In short, the invariant meanings of these signs are:

$$\begin{aligned} \textit{till} (U) &= \textit{Process/Result} + \textit{Chronos/Kairos} \\ \textit{until} (M) &= \textit{Result} + \textit{Kairos}. \end{aligned}$$

### III. Microlevel Data

The following section presents microlevel data: i.e., sentences in context which will be followed by macrolevel data based on the “from sign to text” approach to discourse analysis (Aphek and Tobin 1988, 1999, Tobin 1988, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1994/1995).

#### A. Minimal Pairs

Examples (1-10) present sentences where one of the forms appeared. If a minimal pair with the second form is postulated it results in a different message. The difference in message can be directly attributed to the markedness relationship between them. Examples (1-3) appear originally with the marked form *until* (*RESULT/KAIROS*) indicating a significant point in time which may be perceived as a condition or consequence. If the marked form *until* is replaced by the unmarked form *till*, a durational message is obtained:

- (1) Pollard would not be freed *until* a direct request is made by Rabin.  
(*Jerusalem Post*, 25.7.93) (*until* = condition/consequence), (*till* = duration)
- (2) He won't die *until* his heart stops beating.  
(*until* = condition/consequence) (*till* = duration)
- (3) He will not bury her *until* she is officially considered dead.  
(*until* = condition) (*till* = duration)

Examples (4-7) are expressions which appear with the unmarked form



*till*. If *till* is replaced with the marked form *until* a more explicit resultative rather than durational message is obtained for each of them:

- (4) Wait *till* the cows come home... (duration) (*until* = and then what?/consequence).  
 (5) Wait *till* hell freezes over... (duration) (*until* = and then what?/consequence).  
 (6) I will love you *till* the seas run dry. (*till* = duration) (*until* = condition/consequence).  
 (7) “for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, *till* death do us part”  
 (*until* = condition/consequence).

Examples (8a-b) appear in an Ernest Hemingway novel, where the marked form *until* indicates a condition and the unmarked form *till* indicates duration. Once again, had the forms been exchanged, the messages as well would have been reversed:

- (8)(a) “You better wait *until* the shelling is over,” the major said over his soldier.  
 (*until* = condition) (Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, p.42).  
 (8)(b) “Alright, wait *till* I get cleaned up.” (*till* = duration) (p.17)

Examples (9a-b) appeared in a volume by Amos Oz with *until* indicating a condition and *till* indicating a duration. Once again, had the forms been reversed, the messages would have changed accordingly:

- (9)(a) They stay here *until* they can make enough money to move into the city.  
 (*until* = condition) (Amos Oz, *The Land of Israel*, p.28).  
 (b) Others come and gather round *till* it resembles an outdoor park debate.  
 (*till* = duration) (p.32).

Examples (10a-b) come from a novel by Franz Kafka. Both forms appear and indicate a resultative message, but only the unmarked form allows for a durational message while the marked form *until* appears in the stronger resultative message which does not allow for a durational interpretation:

- (10) (a) He was determined to push forward *till* he reached his sister.  
 (*till* = direction/goal) (Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, p.121).

(b) Gregor, attracted by the playing, ventured to move forward a little *until* his head was actually in the living room.  
(*until* = consequence/goal) (p.120)

## B. Non-Free Variation

Examples (11)-(20) are sentences culled from 19th and 20th Century novels, the Bible, conversation, correspondence, and a popular song by Madonna, where both forms appear in the same context. Once again, the unmarked form *till* indicates a durational message while a resultative interpretation is obtained from the marked form *until*:

(11) He worked from morning *till* night *until* he was too tired to keep his eyes open.

(12) I am bringing a Ron Bennett with me to work with me on my house. I don't think I will have anything for him to do *until* May at the earliest, but he doesn't want to hang about England *till* then.

(13) "Well, he wasn't always a butler; he used to be a silver polisher for some people in New York that had a silver service for two hundred people. He had to polish it from morning *till* night, *until* it finally began to affect his nose." ... "Things went from bad to worse," suggested Miss Baker. "Yes. Things went from bad to worse *until* finally he had to give up his position." (F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, p.20).

(14) Scarpio happening in, caught him at it and held a dagger to Fidelman's ribs — who fruitlessly pleaded they could both make a living *until* the padrone appeared. "A hunchback is straight only in his grave." Angelo slapped Fedelman's face *till* it turned red and the tears flowed freely. (Bernard Malamud, *Pictures of Fidelman. An Exhibition*, p.70).

(15) And *till* Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face: But when Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he took the veil off *until* he came out. (*Exodus* 34: 33,34) .

(16) "I nearly know how to have babies but we don't do it *till* next term."  
(Frances aged 7).

"You can't talk about babies being made *until* you are in the 4th form."  
(Davina aged 10). (Newman, *The Facts of Love*).

(17) Thus it was not *until* we arrived in the street itself that she knew where we were. Clapping her hands with pleasure, and running on before me for a short distance, my little acquaintance stopped at a door, and remaining on the step *till* I came up, knocked at it when I joined her. (Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, p.5).

(18) Then, he would walk with Mrs. Maylie and Rose, and hear them talk of books; or perhaps sit near them, in some shady place and listen whilst the young lady read: which he could have done *until* it grew too dark to see the letters. Then, he had his own lesson for the next day to prepare; and at this, he would work hard, in a little room which looked into the garden, *till* evening came slowly on, when the ladies would walk out again, and he with them. (Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, p.293).

(19) “Not *till* you let me go — not *till* you let me go — Never — never!” screamed the girl. Sikes looked on, for a minute, watching his opportunity and suddenly pinioning her hands dragged her, struggling and wrestling with him by the way, into a small room adjoining, where he sat himself on a bench, and thrusting her into a chair, held her down by force. She struggled and implored by turns *until* twelve o’clock had struck, and then, wearied and exhausted, ceased to contest the point any further. (Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, p.417).

(20) I made it through the wilderness  
 Somehow I made it through  
 Did you know how lost I was  
*Until* I found you  
 You’re so fine and your mine  
 I’ll be yours *till* the end of time (Madonna, “Like A Virgin”)

### C. Multiple Uses of the Same Form

Examples (21)-(24) illustrate the multiple use of these forms in a single passage. Examples (21)-(22) are taken from instructional texts: a cookbook and a guide for parents where the marked form *until* is repeated to indicate different significant stages in a larger process where each stage indicates a goal or a consequential step in the development giving a series of resultative messages:

(21) To cook the dish: Heat the oil in a wok or heavy frying pan *until* it is almost smoking. Add the garlic and then the chicken and ginger, and stir fry *until* the chicken loses its shiny appearance, after about three minutes. Add all the remaining ingredients and stir fry *until* the vegetables are tender. (Evelyn Rose (*The New Jewish Cuisine*, p.149) (Result: change of state oriented).

(22) Early Rising: With a baby who greets her parents with infuriating alertness and energy, ready and eager to start every day when even the roosters are still snoring, there's no hope of further rest *until* night falls once more. It's possible your baby is getting up earlier than she should because she's going to bed too early. Try putting her to bed ten minutes later each night *until* you've gradually postponed her bedtime an hour or more. Keep baby up later during the day. Some early risers are ready to go back to sleep in an hour or two. To discourage this postpone her return to the crib by ten minutes more each morning *until* she's napping an hour or so later, which may eventually help her to extend her night's sleep. All these efforts may, unfortunately, be in vain. Some babies just need less total sleep than others and if yours turns out to be one of them you may have to rise and shine early *until* she's old enough to get up and make her own breakfast. *Until* then, turning in earlier yourselves and sharing the predawn burden by taking turns getting up with your baby, may be the best survival technique. (Eisenberg, Murkoff, Hathaway, *What to expect the first year*, p. 89) (Result: change of state oriented).

Examples (23)-(24) with a multiple use of the unmarked form *till* emphasize the long duration of long periods of time in which results may or may not be implied:

(23) "So the stuff piles up and tourists won't be back here *till* spring. It's a long time *till* the hackensacks and lederhosen come over the alps maestro. Stil, because it's you and I admire your skill, I'll offer you two thousand lire, take it or leave it." (Bernard Malamud, *Pictures of Fidelman. An Exhibition*, p.124) (Process: duration of time oriented).

(24) ... but when he remembered that the Wellends did not expect the wedding to take place *till* the following autumn, and pictured what his life would be *till* then, a dampness fell upon his spirits. (Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, p.63) (Process: duration of time oriented).

#### IV. Macrolevel Data - From Sign to Text

The “from-sign-to-text” approach (Aphek and Tobin 1988, 1989/1990; Tobin 1988, 1990, 1993, 1994/1995) is based on the following principles:

- i. The distribution of the marked versus the unmarked forms is not random, but is skewed along thematic lines within specific texts.
- ii. The choice and preference of the marked form or the unmarked forms can be directly related to particular themes, specific characters and recurring or related events in the plot or subplots within the text.
- iii. Therefore the choice and preference of the marked or unmarked forms can serve as part of a larger system of textual coherence and cohesion.

The from-sign-to-text approach will be used to analyze three texts: *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain and *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* by J.D. Salinger, all of which have a highly skewed distribution of the forms (multiple instances of *till* with a single or only two instances of *until*).

##### A. *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain: 97 *till* / 2 *until*

The text describes the escape of Huck Finn and Jim, a slave and the process of their escape and adventures. Huck is running away from his drunken father and from society (the people who are attempting to educate and civilize him). Jim is running away from his mistress, and is trying to get up North to be free. The story depicts the development of the process of Huck becoming mature and the effect it has on his relationship with Jim. Therefore it is not surprising that there is a significant preference for the unmarked form *till* (97) in these themes relating the process of the escape and Huck’s maturing and his relationship with Jim:

(25) “... and I told Jim to float along down, and show a light when he judged he had gone about two mile, and keep it burning *till* I come.” (128) (Jim running away on a raft to be joined later by Huck).

(26) “I been setting here talking with you all night *till* I reckon you went to sleep ten minutes ago, and I reckon I done the same.” (141) (Huck and Jim lose each other and when Huck finds Jim that he (Jim) was dreaming).

(27) “I went to the raft, and set down in the wigwam to think. But I couldn’t come to nothing . I thought *till* I wore my head sore, but I couldn’t see no way out of the trouble.” (281) (Jim is caught and Huck thinks of what to do).

(28) “So we dug and dug, with the case-knives *till* most midnight... (318) (Tom and Huck trying to help Jim escape by digging into his cabin)

The two examples of the marked form *until* are related to Huck’s realizing the significance of Jim becoming a free man and his role in this and its implications for him in adult society (the major result-oriented theme in this text. It is at these crucial result-oriented points in the story that we have the marked form: *until*.

(29) “My conscience got to stirring me up hotter than ever, *until* at last I says to it: ‘Let up on me – it ain’t too late, yet – I’ll paddle ashore at the first light, and tell.’” (146) (Huck is having ambivalent feelings about helping Jim run away, and this is the point when Huck decides to tell on Jim).

(30) “... and so, sure enough, Tom Sawyer had gone and took all that trouble and bother to set a free nigger free! and I couldn’t ever understand, before *until* that minute and that talk, how he could help a body set a nigger free, with his bringing up.” (366) (The moment when Huck realizes that Jim had been set free and that Tom helped him to run away because Tom knew he was free).

#### B. *The Catcher in the Rye*. 25 *till* / 1 *until*

The classic novel *Catcher in the Rye* has symbolized the search-of-self for several generations. It recounts the adventures of Holden Caulfield, a troubled teenager who has just been expelled from a private school, for a few days in New York before he can go home officially for the Christmas vacation. These adventures not only fill in his time but also give expression to his way of viewing the world and life as a typically mixed up adolescent rejecting

the hypocrisy of phony adult society and his search for a better and more real world. Not surprisingly, this text appears with 25 instances of the unmarked form *till* to indicate events which fill up his time. There is however one example of the marked form *until* which introduces a recurrent *leitmotif* in the text: where do the ducks from the Central Park lake go in the winter when the lake freezes over. This theme can be related to Holden's search for a better world and appears in the text as a recurrent question whose answer plays an important role in Holden's sense of himself and the world and as a barometer or seismograph of his relationships with other people. The following example juxtaposes the use of both forms in a passage describing Holden's taking a cab when he arrives in New York, mistakenly giving his parents' address and then having to decide where to go and what to do before he can show up at home:

(31) I'm so damned absent-minded, I gave the driver my regular address, just out of habit and all — I mean I completely forgot I was going to shack up in a hotel for a couple of days and not go home *till* vacation started. I didn't think of it *till* we were halfway through the park. Then I said, "Hey, do you mind turning when you get a chance I gave you the wrong address. I want to go back downtown."

The driver was sort of a wise guy. "I can't turn around here, Mac. This here's a one-way. I'll have to go all the way to Ninetieth Street now."

I didn't want to start an argument. "Okay," I said. Then I thought of something, all of a sudden. "Hey, listen," I said. "You know the ducks in that lagoon right near Central Park South? That little lake? By any chance, do you happen to know where they go, the ducks, when it gets all frozen over? Do you happen to know, by any chance?" I realized it was only one chance in a million.

He turned around and looked at me like I was a madman. "What're ya tryna do, bud?" he said, "Kid me?"

"No — I was just interested, that's all."

He didn't say anything more, so I didn't either. *Until* we came out of the park at Ninetieth Street. Then he said, "All right, buddy. Where to?" (60).

C. Salinger's *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters*: 10 *till*, 1 *until*

This short story recounts the first person account of a soldier on leave to attend his brother's wedding in New York City. The wedding does not place because the groom did not show up and the soldier eventually finds himself riding in a car with the members of the wedding party and the bride's relatives, who, because of a parade blocking traffic, all end up in the soldier's and his brother's apartment. In this text as well, there is a significant preference for the unmarked form *till* and only a single instance of the marked form *until*. Once again, the marked form appears in the context of a very important and relevant theme or discovery. One of the questions constantly being asked by the members of the wedding party and the bride's family is why the groom has abandoned the bride. The soldier, himself, actually wonders why his brother even got involved with the bride in the first place. The answer appears to be that the bride resembles a young girl, now a famous movie star, with whom the groom was in love many years before. The single instance of *until* appears in the context of the bride's aunt discovering a picture of the movie star as a child, asking another guest, a Lieutenant, whom the girl resembles, and then verifying that she could pass as the bride's double while the soldier admits that he had never actually seen the bride before:

(32) The Lieutenant scrutinized the photograph — rather severely, I thought, as though he by no means approved of the way Mrs. Silsburn, who after all was a civilian as well as a woman, had asked him to examine it. “Muriel,” he said shortly. “Looks like Muriel in this picture. The hair and all.”

“But exactly!” said Mrs. Silsburn. She turned to me. But *exactly*,” she repeated. “Have you ever met Muriel? I mean have you ever seen her when she's had her hair tied in a lovely big —“

”I've never seen Muriel at all *until* today,” I said.

“Well, all right, just take my word.” Mrs. Silsburn tapped the photograph impressively with her index finger. “This child could *double* for Muriel at that age. But to a T.” (83).

In all of the above examples we find that the marked form *until* is linked with key themes which entail a resultative-oriented kind of discovery at a crucial time in the denouement of the text — as befits a marked form. The



unmarked form, on the other hand, serves as part of the backgrounding material in the text and appears much more frequently and in a wide variety of contexts — as befits an unmarked form. It also should be remembered that the marked form *until* may be more appropriate and/or frequent in other kinds of specialized texts — such as cooking books or sets of instructions — where its specific claim for resultativeness and/or a specific *kairos* kind of time plays a crucial role in the text.

## V. Summary and Conclusions

- (1) *TILL* and *UNTIL* are not synonyms.
- (2) *UNTIL* is marked for the distinctive feature *RESULT* which makes it suitable to represent time from the point of view of *KAIROS*: “a point in time filled with a significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end.”
- (3) *TILL* is unmarked for *PROCESS/RESULT* which makes it suitable to represent time both as *CHRONOS*: “passing of time” or “waiting time” or *KAIROS*.
- (4) This semantic distinction is what motivates their non-random distribution in both spoken and written discourse on the micro- and the macro-levels.
- (5) The theoretical and methodological motto of this paper is therefore:  
MEANING MOTIVATES DISTRIBUTION!

Even though the semantic distinction between *TILL/UNTIL* is subtle, in the words of Dwight Bolinger (1971:17): ... who says semantic distinctions have to be gross?

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