

Change of meaning. Extension, narrowing, elevation, degradation of meaning of a word, metaphor, metonymy.

- Definition of changes of word meaning
- Types of changes
 1. Extension
 2. Elevation
 3. Narrowing
 4. Degradation

Metaphor

Metonymy

Changes in word meaning

- When a word loses its old meaning and comes to refer to something different, the result is a change in word meaning.
- Change of meaning refers to the **alternation** of the meaning of existing words, as well as the **addition** of new meaning to a particular word.
- Changing word meaning **has never ceased** since the beginning of the language and will continue in the future.
- The changes in meaning are **gradual**, and words are not changed in a day.

Types of Semantic Change

- Extension of meaning**
- Narrowing of meaning**
- Elevation of meaning**
- Degradation of meaning**

Extension of Meaning

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- **Generalization of Meaning**

- It is a process by which a word which originally had a specialized meaning has now become generalized or has extended to cover a broader concept.

salary

- (original) a sum of money given to Roman soldiers to enable them to buy salt
- (present) fixed payment made by employer at regular intervals to employees

holiday

- (original) holy day, a day of religious significance
- (present) day of festivity or recreation

A large proportion of polysemous words of modern English have their meanings extended sometime in the course of development. Some words are generalized to such a degree that they can mean almost everything.

She is such a pretty little thing.

I have to pack my things for the journey.

There is another thing I want to ask you about.

That only makes things worse.

The thing is, can we finish the job in time?

“Thing” which used to mean “a public assembly” or “a council” in Anglo-Saxon times, now has become an all-purpose word. Its meaning is so general, and we sometimes call this new use a ‘light noun’.

- Generalization of meaning is also found in many technical terms, which are confined to specialized use.

allergic

(original) too sensitive to medicine

(present) averse or disinclined

alibi

(original) a legal term signifying “the plea that the accused is not at the place when the crime is committed”

(present) excuse

Narrowing of Meaning

- It is a process by which a word of wide meaning acquires a narrow or specialized sense. In other words, a word which used to have a more general sense becomes restricted in its application and conveys a special concept in present-day English.
- **Narrowing; specialization; restriction**

Example	Original Meaning	Meaning after Narrowing
meat	food	flesh of animals
disease	discomfort	illness
wife	woman	married woman
starve	to die	to die of hunger
accident	event	unfortunate event

Change in associative meaning

- Both extension and narrowing of meaning are talking about the changes in conceptual meaning. Next we will talk about the changes in associative meaning.
 - **Elevation of meaning**
 - **Degradation of meaning**

Elevation of Meaning (amelioration)

- It is the process by which words rise from humble beginnings to positions of importance.
- Some words early in their history signify something quite low or humble, but change to designate something agreeable or pleasant.
- A “snarl” word becomes a “purr” word, or a slang becomes a common word.
- elevation; amelioration**

Examples of elevation

nice

-ignorant --- foolish --- delightful, pleasant

fond

-foolish --- affectionate

awesome

-terrible---terrific

marshal

-a keeper of horses --- a high ranking army officer

constable

-a keeper of horses --- a policeman

Terrific headache

Terrific party

Degradation of Meaning

- It is a process by which words with **appreciatory** or **neutral** affective meaning fall into ill reputation or come to be used in a **derogatory** sense.
- A “purr” word becomes a “snarl” word.
- **degradation, degeneration, pejoration**

Examples

silly

- blessed and happy--- innocent----simple or simple-minded ----foolish

sad

- full, satisfied, contented ----- calm ----- serious
-----sorrowful

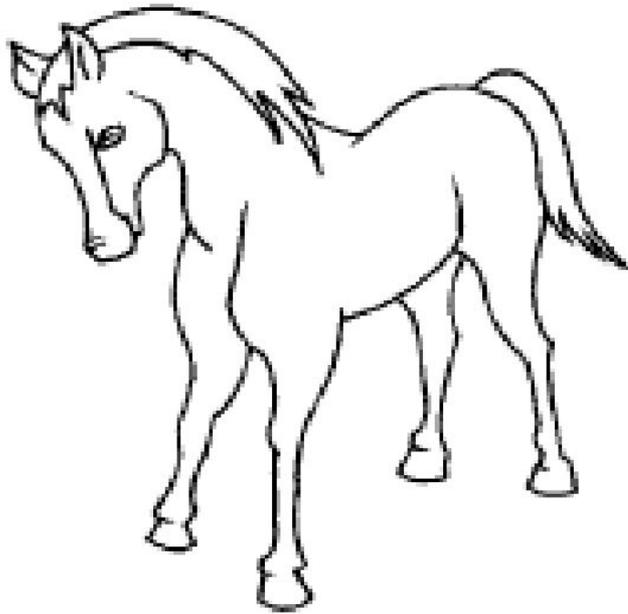
Semantic transfer

Change in word meaning may result from the figurative use of the language. **Metaphor** and **metonymy** are two important figures of speech.

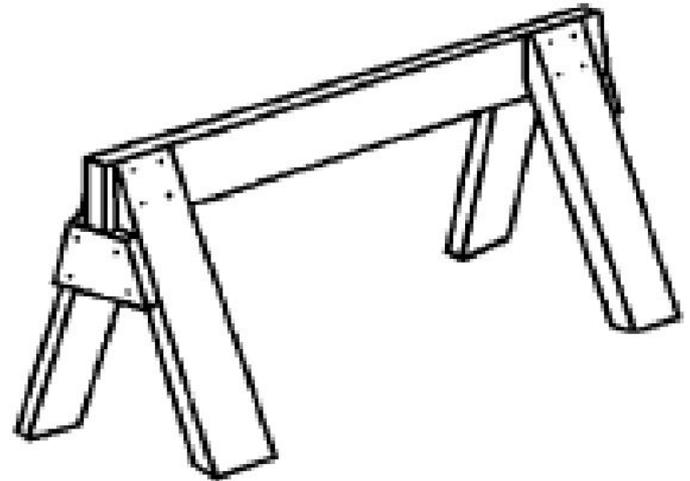
- Metaphor is a figure of speech containing an implied comparison based on similarity.
- E.x.: A cunning person may be referred to as a fox. Here “fox” means something other than its literal meaning. The word “fox” gets the figurative meaning of “a cunning person”.

Metaphor

This is also a horse, but a metaphorical horse.



A Real Horse



A Metaphorical Horse

Example of a linguistic metaphor: *foot*

foot

This meaning is derived through the metaphor
“The last line on this page is the foot of the page.”

1. The lower extremity of the vertebrate leg that is in direct contact with the ground in standing or walking.
2. The lowest part; the bottom

the foot of a mountain

the foot of a page

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- Metonymy is another important factor in semantic change. It is a figure of speech by which an object or an idea is described by the name of something else closely related to it.

Example: *seat*

Seat (its sense is extended to **the right to sit as a member of a committee**, such as the House of Commons)

He lost his seat in House of Commons.

The word “seat” has acquired the meaning of “the right to sit as a member” through the above metonym.

More Example: *cradle*

Cradle

These meanings are derived through the following metonyms.

1. A small low bed for an infant, often furnished with rockers

2. The earliest period of life; infancy

from the cradle to the grave

3. A place of origin; a birthplace

the cradle of civilization.