

Semantic structure of words

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* **Plan:**

- * The word and its meaning. Denotational, connotational components.
- * Types of lexical meaning. The lexical and grammatical meanings of the word.
- * Semantic changes. Causes of semantic changes: elevation (amelioration), degradation (pejoration).
- * Definition and classification of synonyms in Modern English. Sources of synonyms.
- * Definition and classification of antonyms. Sources of antonyms.
- * Definition and classification of homonyms and polysemy. Sources of homonyms.
- * Euphemisms, their specific features.
- * Results of semantic change; metaphor, metonymy its



**What's the
Word?**

- * **Words are the central elements of language system. They face both ways: they are the biggest units of morphology and the smallest units of syntax. Words can be separated in an utterance by other such units and can be used in isolation. Uniting meaning and form, a word is composed of one or more morphemes each consisting of one or more spoken sounds or their written representation.**



Word-meaning

Two schools:

- ❖ **the referential approach**, which seeks to formulate the essence of meaning by establishing the interdependence between words and the things or concepts they denote
- ❖ **the functional approach**, which studies the functions of a word in speech and is less concerned with what meaning is than with how it works

Denotational component.

The word “denotational” is formed from the word *denote* – to state as a name for something. Denotational meaning is a kind of meaning when a word serves as a name for an object of extralinguistic reality. The word is used in its significative meaning when it serves a name for a class of objects and denotes a general idea of an object.

F.e.: East or West home is best; A good laugh is sunshine in the house.

The word is used in its demonstrative meaning when it serves to name individual elements of reality.

F.e.: She studied to make their home a nice place.

Connotational component

It is the part of lexical meaning which reflects the attitude of the speaker to what he speaks about.

Emotive charge. *F.e.: "father" is neutral and "daddy" is emotionally colored.*

Expressiveness sometimes is called intensity. *F.e.: "love" and "adore", the first word is more intense.*

Imagery presupposes the image which we have in our mind when we use the word in its figurative meaning.

Evaluation. It can be positive and negative. *F.e.: "лошадь" – "кляча", "помощник" – "пособник", "to clique" – "group".*

Types of meanings

The word combines in its semantic structure two meanings:

- *Lexical meaning* is the individual meaning of the word, including everything as a thing or object (*table, peace, boy*).
- *Grammatical meaning* is the meaning of the whole class or a subclass of words. The grammatical form is not confined to an individual word, but unites a whole class of words, so that each word of the class expresses the corresponding grammatical meaning together with its individual, concrete semantics.

The lexical meanings of such words as “*a table*”, “*a pen*” are different but the grammatical meanings are the same because both of them are nouns of the same number and case.



TYPES OF LEXICAL MEANING

- Nominative
- Nominative-derivative
- Linguistically (colligationally and collocationally) bound
- Phraseologically bound

Types of lexical meaning according to Виноградов:

1) **nominative meaning** is the basic meaning of a word which refers to objects of extralinguistic reality in a direct way. F.e. "a chair"

2) **nominative-derivative meaning** comes into existence when the word is stretched out semantically to cover new facts and phenomena of extralinguistic reality. F.e.: Petrov is the chair of our meeting; the English chair – кафедра английского языка.

These two meanings are based on contiguity.

3) **colligationally conditioned** (морфо-синтаксически обусловленное). Colligational is a given morpho-syntactic pattern. Verb + Object + Infinitive. F.e.: "to make" – "to make smb to do smth": "to carry" – "the bill was carried by the Parliament".

4) **collocationally conditioned**. Collocation is a marriage contract between words. Collocationally conditioned is determined by the combine ability of words. F.e.: "walk". When this word is used in combination with adjectives describing some territory the meaning is "route, path". If this word is used in combination with such adjectives as "lazy", "quick", "morning" it means "a journey on foot".

5) **phraseologically bound**. Phraseologically bound meaning appears in the idioms and phraseologically units. F.e.: "blank". Blank wall" – a wall without a window; "Blank despair" – the highest degree of despair; "Blank verse" – белый стих. "To kick the bucket" – умереть.

Semantic change

– changes of both synchronic and diachronic nature, which concerns the semantic content of the word. New meanings would appear by means of semantic shift (q.v.) and semantic transference (q.v.), which lead to the growth of polysemy. Causes for s.ch. can be both extralinguistic and linguistic.



CAUSES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE

Extra-linguistic

Linguistic

Ellipsis

differentiation of synonyms

fixed context



Types of semantic changes

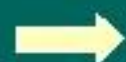
Pejoration of meaning (also degradation of meaning) – the appearance of a derogatory and scornful emotive charge in the meaning of the word (when a word with a positive sense develops a negative one).

Examples:

- ❖ *knave* 'a rogue - мошенник' (a dishonest or unscrupulous man) < OE: *cnafa* 'a youth, a child' > 'servant' ;
 - ❖ *spinster* 'unmarried woman - старая дева' < 'one who spins' ;
 - ❖ *silly* 'foolish, stupid' < ME *sely* 'happy, innocent' < OE *sælig* "'blessed, blissful';
 - ❖ *disease* 'illness' < 'discomfort' (cf. dis+ease).
-

Amelioration (elevation) is the way of transforming the meaning when it becomes better in the cause of time:

knight meant *a boy*, then became *a servant*, at last it acquired a meaning of *a noble man*.




OE *cwen* 'a woman' → ModE *queen*
noble as 'possessing high ideals or excellent moral character' from 'belonging to the nobility'

CLASSIFICATION OF SYNONYMS

Stylistic synonymy implies no interchangeability in context because the underlying situations are different,

e.g. children – infants, dad – father.



Synonymy - the kind of semantic relations that implies the coincidence in the essential meanings of linguistic elements, which usually preserve their differences in connotations and stylistic characteristics.

Synonymy does not present a perfect type of a linguistic category.

Classification of synonyms



1. *Total synonyms* can replace each other in any given context, without the slightest alteration in denotative or emotional meaning and connotations is a rare occasion.

2. *Ideographic synonyms*. They bear the same idea but not identical in their referential content. Ex.: To happen – to occur – to befall – to chance;

3. *Dialectical synonyms*. pertaining to different variant of language from dialectal stratification point of view; Ex.: lift – elevator;

4. *Contextual synonyms*. Context can emphasize some certain semantic trades & suppress other semantic trades; words with different meaning can become synonyms in a certain context. Ex.: tasteless – dull;

5. *Stylistic synonyms*. Belong to different styles: child; Infant; Kid;

6. *cognitive synonyms* – s. which differ in respect of the varieties of discourse in which they appear;

7. *contextual/context-dependent synonyms* – similar in meaning only under some specific distributional conditions, when the difference between the meanings of two words is contextually neutralized: e.g. buy and get.

Sources of Synonyms

Synonymic attraction - the referent which is very popular attracts a large number of synonyms

e.g. variants and dialects of English e.g.

lass (Scottish) - girl (English)

long-distance call (USA) – trunk call (British)

Antonym- a word that expresses a meaning opposed to the meaning of another word, in which case the two words are antonyms of each other. **Antonyms** - words of the same category of parts of speech which have contrasting meanings such as hot - cold, light - dark, happiness - sorrow.

Morphological classification:

- Root words form absolute antonyms.(write - wrong).
- The presence of negative affixes creates - derivational antonyms(happy - unhappy).

Semantical classification:

Contradictory notions are mutually opposed and denying one another, i.e. alive means “not dead” and impatient means “not patient”.

Contrary notions are also mutually opposed but they are gradable; e.g. old and young are the most distant elements of a series like: old - middle - aged - young.

Incompatibles semantic relations of incompatibility exist among the antonyms with the common component of meaning and may be described as the relations of exclusion but not of contradiction: to say “morning” is to say “not afternoon, not evening, not night”.

*Homonyms (from Gr. “homos” means “the same”, “omona” means “name”) are the words, different in meaning and either identical both in sound and spelling or identical only in spelling or sound. The most widely accepted classification of them is following:

*1. Homonyms proper (or perfect homonyms)

*2. Homophones

*3. Homographs

- * 1. **Homonyms proper** are words identical in pronunciation and spelling:
- * a) “Ball” as a round object used in game, “ball” as a gathering of people for dancing;
- * b) “Bark” v to utter sharp explosive cries; “bark” n is a noise made by dog or a sailing ship, etc.
- * b) “Bay” v is to bark; “bay” n is a part of the sea or the lake filling wide mouth opening of the land, or the European laurel[1], or гнедая лошадь.
- * You should remember, that homonyms are distinct words – not different meanings within one word

* **2. Homophones** are words of the same sound, but of different meaning, for example:

* “Air” - “heir”, “arms” - “alms”, “bye” - “buy” - “by”, “him” - “hymn”, “knight” - “night”, “rain” - “reign”, “not” - “knot”, “or” - “ore” - “oar”, “piece” - “peace”, “scent” - “cent”, “steal” - “steel” - “still”, “write” - “right”, “sea” - “see”, “son” - “sun”.

* **3. Homographs** are words different in sound and in meaning but accidentally identical in spelling:

Bow [bou] – лук / [bau] – поклон или нос корабля

Lead [li:d] – вести / [led] – свинец

Row [rou] – грести или ряд / [rau] – шум, скандал

Sever [sov] – шея / [sjuv] – сточная труба

Tear [tεe] – рвать / [ti] – слеза

*Polysemy is the existence of several meanings for a single word or phrase. The word polysemy comes from the Greek words poly-, “many” and sêma, “sign”. In other words it is the capacity for a word, phrase, or sign to have multiple meanings i.e., a large semantic field. Polysemy is a pivotal concept within the humanities, such as media studies and linguistics.

*This word calls the process of plurality of meaning. Polysemy exist only in the language, not in speech. In different context we can observe cases of indential or different meanings.

Sources of homonymy

1. Phonetic changes words undergo during the historical development.

knight (O.E. *kniht*) and *night* (O.E. *niht*).

to write (O.E. *writan*) and *right* (O.E. *reht, riht*)

2. Borrowings (can in the final stage of its phonetic adaptation duplicate either a native word or another borrowing).

fair (a *fair deal*) – native (of anglo-saxon origin)

fair (a *gathering of buyers and sellers*) – French borrowing.

3. Word-building (conversion) – transferring from one part of the speech to another.

comb, n. – to comb, v.

4. Shortening.

fan from fanatic and *fan* – ventilator

rep – reputation or representative

For modern linguists it is hard to distinguish between polysemy and homonymy. In case of concatenation the last meaning can drop out of the polysemantic structure of a word.

What is Euphemism?



Euphemism:

*Examples and Explanations:

1. Instead of saying, “He **died** in his sleep.”

➤ Rather say, “He **passed away** in his sleep.”

2. Instead of saying, “The vet is going to **kill** my dog tomorrow.”

➤ Rather say, “The vet is going to **put** my dog **to sleep** tomorrow.”

3. Instead of saying, “The **dustmen** collect our **rubbish** on Monday’s.”

➤ Rather say, “The **sanitary disposal officers** collect our **waste** on Monday’s.”

Semantic change is possible because human beings have the cognitive capability to form associations between different concepts. There are two principle types of associations: metaphor and metonymy.

A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object or action in a way that isn't literally true, but helps explain an idea or make a comparison.

Here are the basics:

- 1) A metaphor states that one thing is another thing
- 2) It equates those two things not because they actually are the same, but for the sake of comparison or symbolism
- 3) If you take a metaphor literally, it will probably sound very strange (are there actually any sheep, black or otherwise, in your family?)
- 4) Metaphors are used in poetry, literature, and anytime someone wants to add some color to their language

Metonymy (/mɛ'tɒnəmi/) is a figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept.

Metonymy and related figures of speech are common in everyday speech and writing.

Synecdoche and metalepsis are considered specific types of metonymy. Polysemy, multiple meanings of a single word or phrase, sometimes results from relations of metonymy. Both metonymy and metaphor involve the substitution of one term for another. In metaphor, this substitution is based on some specific analogy between two things, whereas in metonymy the substitution is based on some understood association or contiguity.

A scroll of aged parchment with a red, white, and blue striped background. The scroll is unrolled and has a textured, yellowish-brown appearance. The text is centered on the scroll in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The background consists of diagonal stripes of red, white, and blue.

**Thank your for your
attention!**