

Semantics

- **Semantics (semasiology)** is a branch of lexicology that is devoted to the study of word meaning.
- the semantics of a word = the meaning of a word

Meaning

- a component of the word through which a **concept** is communicated, thus enabling this word to denote real objects, qualities and abstract notions.

Two aspects of the word:

- the outer aspect, the material side of the word (план выражения) (i.e. its sound form)
- the inner aspect, the ideal side of the word (план содержания) (its meaning).

Types of meaning

- **Grammatical meaning:** *tables, students, houses, jokes* - the grammatical meaning of plurality.
- The component of meaning recurrent in identical sets of individual forms of different words. E.g. the tense meaning (*went, answered, wrote*), the case meaning (*parents', sister's, student's, etc.*).

Types of meaning

- **Lexical meaning** is identical in all the forms of the word. E.g. *write, writes, wrote, writing, written.*
- The meaning proper to the given linguistic unit in all its forms and distributions
- Both the lexical and grammatical meanings make up **the word-meaning** as neither can exist without the other.

The components of meaning

- the denotative component (denotation)
- the connotative component (connotation)

The denotative component of meaning (denotation)

- is the principal part of meaning that makes communication possible. It expresses the conceptual content of a word.
- *lonely*: alone, without a company
- *notorious*: well known
- *celebrated*: well known
- *to adore*: to love
- *to glare*: to look
- *to glance*: to look

The connotative component of meaning (connotation)

- is what the word implies in addition to its denotative meaning. It is the set of associations that a word's use can evoke.
- E.g. *a hovel*: “a small house” + “miserable, dirty, in bad repair, unpleasant to live in”.

Types of connotation:

- emotive
- evaluative
- expressive (intensifying)
- pragmatic (i.e. connotation of duration, manner, cause, etc.)

The connotative component

- *lonely*: unhappy (emotive connotation)
- *notorious*: about something bad (evaluative connotation, negative)
- *celebrated*: about something good (evaluative connotation, positive)
- *to adore*: deep feeling (expressive connotation)
- *to glare*: steadily (connotation of duration) + in angry, fierce way (emotive connotation)
- *to glance*: briefly (connotation of duration)

Denotative and connotative components

- Often a word's connotation is fully explained in the dictionary.
- Otherwise it can be realized through the context.

E.g. *Los Angeles is **notorious** for its smog.*

- Denotative and connotative components make up **the semantic structure of a word.**

Semantic Transfer

- The process of development of a new meaning (or a change of meaning) is termed **transference**.

Types of transference:

- metaphor
- metonymy

Metaphor

- **Metaphor** is a type of transference based on the similarity of the objects, qualities or phenomena denoted by the words.

Types of metaphor:

- similarity of shape: thus we can speak of the *eye of a needle*
- position: *head of a tree*
- function: *hands of a clock*, etc.

Metonymy

- is based on the contiguity (смежность) of the objects, qualities or phenomena denoted by the words.

Types of metonymy:

- The name of the place - its inhabitants: *school*
- Quality - the subject of this quality: *beauty*
Material - the product made of this material:
bronze, clay, silver
- Animal – the meat of this animal: *fowl, turkey*
Action – the subject of the action: *safeguard, support*

Results of semantic change

Change of the denotative component:

- broadening (generalization) of meaning: *bird, pipe*
- narrowing (specialization) of meaning: *hound, girl*

Change of the connotative component:

- Elevation of meaning (the improvement of the connotative component of meaning): *minister, knight*
- Degeneration of meaning (the acquisition by the word of some derogatory emotive charge): *boor, silly*

Polysemy

- **Polysemy** is the ability of a word to possess several meanings. E.g. *bright*: ‘shining’; ‘intelligent’.
- A word having several meanings is called **polysemantic**.
- Words having only one meaning are called **monosemantic** (*morpheme, antibiotics*).

Lexico-semantic variant

(A. I. Smirnitsky)

- **LSV** is a two-sided unit, the material side of which is the sound-form of a word, while the ideal side is one of the meanings of the given word.
- **The semantic centre of the word** is the part of meaning which remains constant in all the lexico-semantic variants of the word.

The semantic centre of the word

E.g. dull:

- **Boring** – the deficiency in interest
- **Stupid** - the deficiency in intellect
- **Not clear or bright** - the deficiency in colour
- **Not loud or distinct** - the deficiency in sound
- **Not sharp** - the deficiency in sharpness

Diachronic perspective of polysemy

If polysemy is viewed **diachronically** it is understood as the development of the semantic structure of the word.

Types of meaning:

- the primary meaning
- the secondary meaning

The primary meaning

e.g. table:

- a piece of furniture;
- people seating at a table;
- a meal;
- a list of figures arranged in an ordered way (таблица);
- **a flat slab of stone or wood (плита)**

The synchronic perspective of polysemy

Synchronically polysemy is understood as the coexistence of various meanings of the same word at a certain historical period of the development of the English language.

Types of meaning:

- the central (basic) meaning
- marginal (minor) meanings

The central (basic) meaning

The central meaning occurs in different contexts, possesses the highest frequency of value, while marginal meanings are observed only in certain contexts and are less frequent.

E.g. *table*:

- **a piece of furniture;**
- people seating at a table;
- a meal;
- a list of figures arranged in an ordered way;
- a flat slab of stone or wood

Meaning and context

The actual meaning of a polysemantic word is revealed through the context.

Context is the minimal stretch of speech determining each individual meaning of the word

Types of context:

- linguistic
- extra-linguistic

Linguistic contexts

- **lexical:** the groups of lexical items are combined with the polysemantic word under consideration.

E.g. *heavy*: 'of great weight' (*heavy load, table*); 'abundant, striking, falling with force' (*heavy rain, storm, snow, wind*); 'the larger kind of smth' (*heavy industry, artillery, arms*)

- **grammatical:** the grammatical (syntactic) structure of the context serves to determine various individual meanings of a polysemantic word.

E.g. *to make* 'to force, to induce': to make + prn. + verb (*to make smb. laugh, work, sit*); 'to become': to make + adj. + noun (*to make a good wife, a good teacher*)

Extra-linguistic context

The meaning of a word is ultimately determined by the actual speech situation in which the word is used.

E.g. *The **bill** is large.* (the meaning is ambiguous)

*The **bill** is large but need not be paid.* (the meaning is clear)

E.g. *John was looking for the **glasses**.* (the meaning is ambiguous)