



SEMASIOLOGY

Lecture 6

1. Types of meaning

Semasiology is the branch of Linguistics which studies the meaning of words, called *semantics*.

The name comes from the Greek *semasia* “signification” (from *sema* “sign” *semantikos* “significant” and *logos* “learning”).

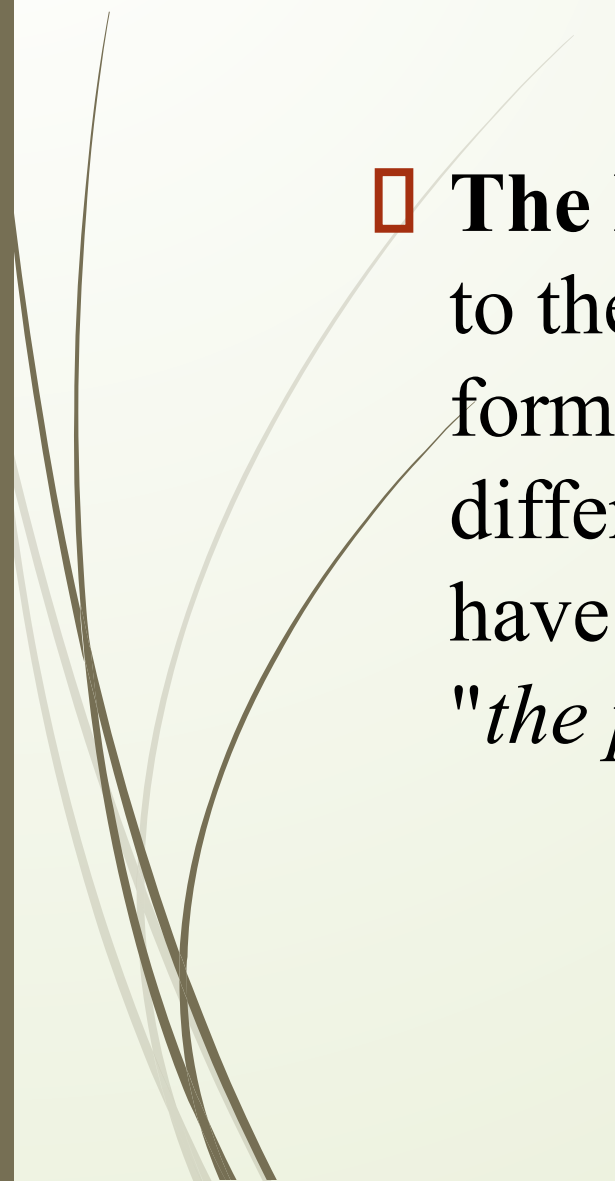



The main objects of semasiological study are:

Semantic development of English words its causes and classification, relevant distinctive features and types of meaning, polysemy and the semantic structure of the English polysemantic words and compounds, semantic grouping and connections in the vocabulary system.

There are two main types of meaning **grammatical** meaning and **lexical** meaning.


- **The grammatical meaning** is the meaning of an inflectional morpheme or of some other syntactic device, as word order. It depends on its role in a sentence.
- For example, the **tense** meaning in the word forms of the verbs: *worked, told, bought*; the meaning of plurality: *analyses, boys, types*; the case meaning of nouns: *women's, the green grocer's, the optician's*.



□ **The lexical meaning** of the word is the meaning proper to the given linguistic unit in all its forms. The word forms of the verb: *to talk, talks, talked, talking* possess different grammatical meanings, but in each form they have one and the same semantic component denoting "*the process of speaking*".

2. The causes of semantic changes

- The causes of semantic changes can be **extra-linguistic** and **linguistic**.
- By **extra-linguistic** causes we mean various changes in the life of the speech community, changes in economic and social structure, scientific concepts and other spheres of human activities as reflected in word meaning.
- For example, the word "*pen*" comes back to the Latin word "penna" (a feather of a bird). As people wrote with goose pens the name was transferred to steel pens which were later on used for writing. Still later any instrument for writing was called "a pen".


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- The main form of **linguistic cause** is **discrimination/differentiation** of synonyms which can be illustrated by the semantic development of a number of words.
 - The conflict of synonyms when a perfect synonym of a native word is borrowed from some other language one of them may specialize in its meaning, e.g. in old English the noun "**tide**" was polysemantic and denoted "*time*", "*season*", "*hour*".
 - When the French words "*time*", "*season*", "*hour*" were borrowed into English they ousted the word "**tide**" in these meanings. It was specialized and now means (*regular movement of sea towards and away from the land*).



3.Semantic structure of English words

Every word has two aspects **the outer aspect** (its sound form) and **the inner form** (its meaning) which presents a structure called **the semantic structure of the word**. It is known that most words convey several concepts and possess the corresponding number of meanings. One and the same word in different syntactical relations can develop different meanings, e.g. the verb "treat" in sentences:

- *The wood is **treated** with chemicals.*
- *She was **treated** for minor injuries.*
- *They **treated** me to sweets.*
- *He **treats** his son cruelly.*
- *These payments will be **treated** as income.*
- *He **treated** my words as a joke.*

In all these sentences the verb "**treat**" has different meanings and we can speak about polysemy.

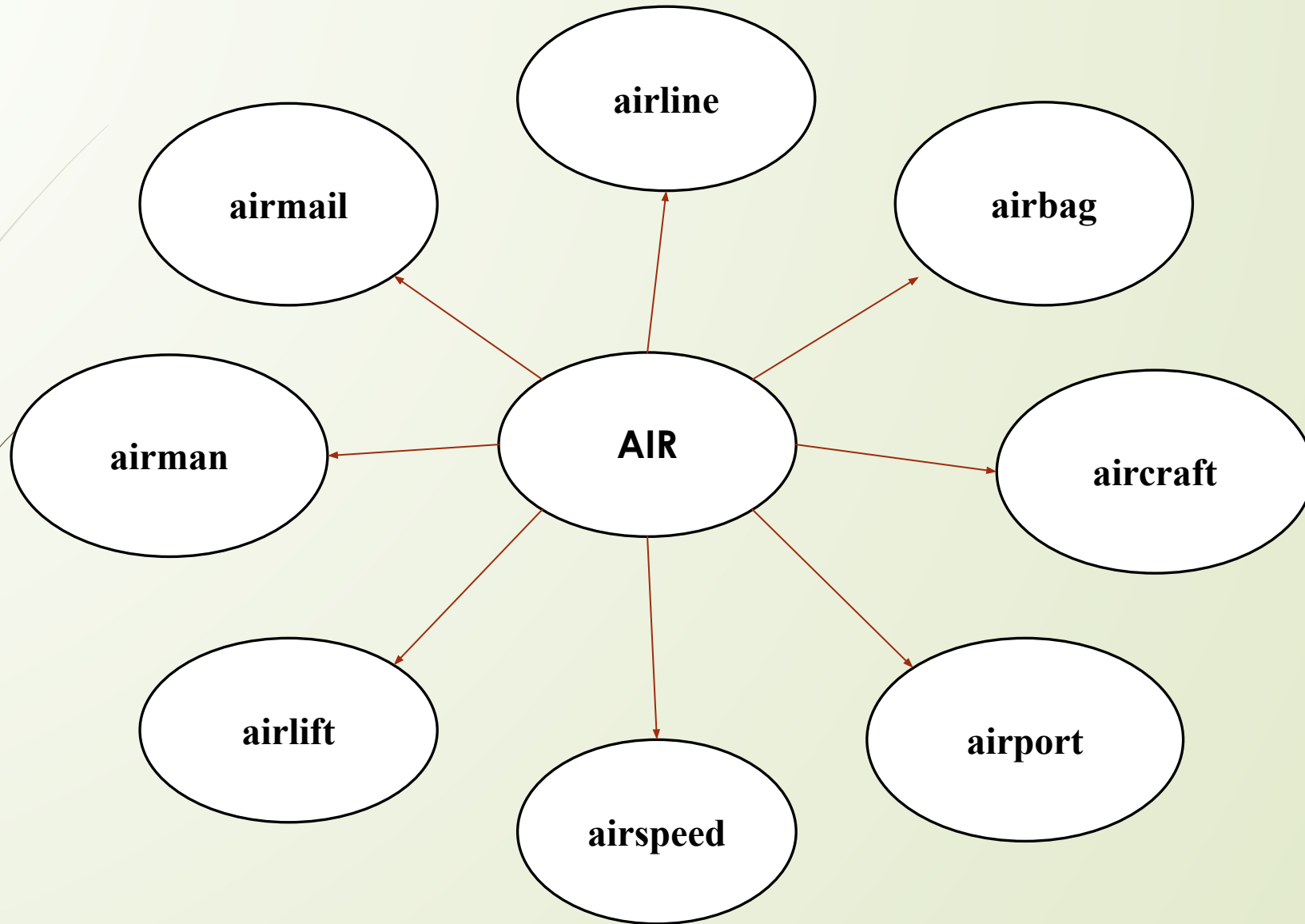
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- A word having several meanings is called **polysemantic** and words having only one meaning are called **monosemantic** these words are few in number, e.g. *molecule, hydrogen, oxygen*. These words are mainly scientific terms.
 - The bulk of English words are **polysemantic**. The ability of words to have more than one meaning is described by the term **polysemy**.
 - **Polysemy** is a phenomenon which has an exceptional importance for the description of a language system and for the solution of practical tasks connected with an adequate understanding of the meaning of a word and its use.


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- Different meanings of a polysemantic word may come together due to the proximity of notions which they express.
 - For example, the word **blanket** has the following meanings: *a woolen covering used on beds, a covering for keeping a horse warm, a covering of any kind (a blanket of snow), covering all or most cases used attributively, e.g. we can say (A blanket insurance policy).*





Levels of analysis of the semantic structure of a polysemantic word

- The semantic structure of a polysemantic word can be distinguished between **two levels of analysis**.
- On the first level the semantic structure is presented by different meanings as the main or primary meaning stands in the centre and the secondary meanings proceed out of it like rays. Each second remaining can be traced to the primary meaning. This type of the semantic structure of a polysemantic word is called as **radial polysemy** and can be presented on the diagram.



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- From the diagram above it is observed that all secondary meanings of the key word "**air**" are connected with the primary meaning in the center and motivated by it.
 - **The second level of analysis** is determined as the semantic components within each separate meaning, where some semantic structures are arranged on different principles, they are not correlated with each other and have variable meanings. This type of a polysemantic word can be called **the chain of polysemy**.
 - In the following list of meanings of the adjectives *dull* and *high* one can hardly find a generalized meaning covering and holding together the rest of the semantic structure.

Dull		High	
The different meanings		The different meanings	
A dull book, a dull film	Uninteresting, boring	A high road	A main or important road
A dull weather, a dull day, a dull colour	Not clear or bright	A high roller	A person who spends a lot of money, especially on gambling
A dull pupil	stupid	A high season	The time of year when a hotel area receives most visitors
A dull sound	Not loud or distinct	High speed	Very fast
A dull knife	Not sharp	High tea	A meal with cakes and tea usually eaten in the late afternoon
Dull eyes	Seeing badly	A high street	A main street in the city with a lot of shops, banks etc.
Dull ears	Hearing badly	High risk	A lot of danger and the risk of injury, death, damage etc.

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- As you see from this table the adjectives *dull* and *high* with the different nouns forming new word-groups which are distinguished into separate meanings.
 - In most cases in the semantic development of a word both ways: **radial polysemy** and **chain polysemy** are combined.



4. Nature of semantic changes

A necessary condition of any semantic change is some connection, some association between the old meaning and new one.

There are two kinds of association involved in various semantic changes - **metaphor** and **metonymy**.

Metaphor

The word "*metaphor*" came from the Greek language *metaphero* (to carry over, to transfer) - *meta* (between) and *phero* (to bear, to carry).

A **metaphor** is a transfer of the meaning based on comparison and an association of similarity of two objects, phenomena. Metaphor can be based on different types of similarity:

- ❑ **Similarity or shape**, e.g. *head* (of a cabbage), *the neck* (of the bottle), *teeth* (of a saw, a comb);
- ❑ **Similarity of position**, e.g. *foot* (of a page, of a mountain), *head* (of a chair, the procession);
- ❑ **Similarity of function, behavior**, e.g. *a lady-killer* - a man who is attractive and successful with women and can fascinate them, *a whip* (an official in the British Parliament whose duty is to see that members were present at the voting)
- ❑ **Similarity of color**, e.g. *orange*, *hazel*, *chestnut*, *the gilded youth*, *a sunny smile*, *black gold*, *black economy*.

Metaphor

- Many metaphors are based on **parts of a human body**, e.g. *the leg of a table, an eye of a needle, arms and mouth of a river, head of an army*.
- A special type of metaphor is when **proper names become common nouns**, e.g. *philistine*- a mercenary person, *vandals* - destructive people, *a Don Juan* - a lover of many women, etc.
- When new words are needed in order to describe things that did not exist before, they are often created by means of metaphor. With the growth of computer technology, we need words to describe many new objects and activities - and most of these new words have been produced metaphorically: *surfing, net, home, page, mailbox, mouse, virus, window*.

Metonymy

Metonymy is a transfer of the meaning on the basis of contiguity. It is a change of names between things that are known to be in some way and associating two referents, one of which can have resembles the other. There are different types of metonymy:


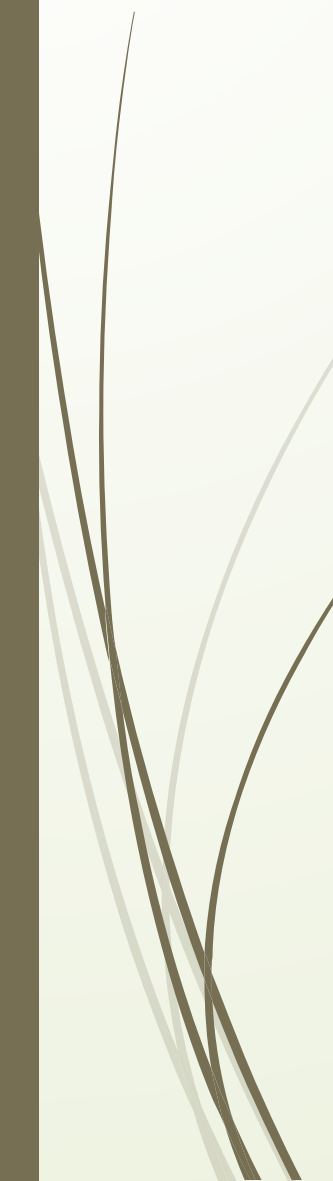
- ❑ **The material of which an object is made may become the name of the object**, e.g. *a glass, board, iron* etc.;
- ❑ **The name of the place may become the name of the people or of an object placed there**, e.g. *the House* – members of Parliament, *Fleet Street* – bourgeois press, *the White House* – the Administration of the USA, etc.;
- ❑ **Names of musical instruments may become names of musicians**, e.g. *the violinist, the saxophonist, the pianist*, etc.;

Metonymy

- ❑ **The name of some person may become a common noun**, e.g. “**boycott**” was originally the name of an Irish family who were so much disliked by their neighbours that they did not mix with them, “**sandwich**” was named after Lord Sandwich who was a gambler. He did not want to interrupt his game and had his food brought to him while he was playing cards between two slices of bread not to soil his fingers;
- ❑ **Names of inventors** very often become terms to denote things they invented, e.g. “watt”, “ohm”, “roentgen” etc.;
- ❑ **Some geographical names can also become common nouns through metonymy**, e.g. Holland (linen fabrics), Brussels (a special kind of carpets), china (porcelain), astrakhan (a sheep fur) etc.

5. The main Semantic Aspects of Compounds

- The structural meaning of compounds is formed on the base of the the order and arrangement of the constituents of a compound word.
- A change in the order and arrangement of the same components of the word gives us the compounds with different lexical meanings, e.g. *finger-ring* denotes *a ring which is worn on finger*, whereas the compound word *ring-finger* means *the finger next to the little finger, especially of the left hand, on which the wedding ring is worn*.
- So, these words contain two root morphemes, the combined lexical meaning of which can be changed account for the difference in the arrangement of the component morphemes.

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- The semantic structure of compound words can be changed in a result of rearrangement of their distributional patterns, e.g. *dog house* – it is a special house for a dog (кошара), *house-dog* – it is a kind of a dog living near the house or in the house and protecting the house and housekeeper. The shift in order and place of the constituent parts of a compound can destroy its meaning.

The semantic structure of compounds

The semantic structure of compounds can be divided into two groups:

- a) **Non-idiomatic compounds**
- b) **Idiomatic compounds**

Non-idiomatic compounds represent meanings which can be described as the sum of their constituent meanings, e.g. *classroom*, *bedroom*, *raincoat*, *nightdress*, *dancing-hall*, *changing-room*.



The compounds which meanings do not correspond to the separate meanings of the constituent parts are called **idiomatic compounds**.

They are divided into two types:


- ❑ **Partial** (non complete) changed meaning;
- ❑ **Total** (complete) changed meaning.

In the first type of compounds one of the components has changed its meaning. In this type of compound words we see the process of alternation of meaning.

E.g. *a blackbird, a blackboard, chatter-box, blackberries.*

For example, the compounds *a blackbird, a bluebird* convey only one concept: **the type of bird**.

The compound word *blue-baby* is about a child who has a weak heart or something wrong with heart whose skin is slightly blue.

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- **The second type of compounds** it is a process of complete change of meaning or the key semantic aspect has been lost, e.g. *a ladybird, tallboy, bluestockings, bluebottle, butter-fingers, lady-killer, lady-finger.*
 - **A ladybird** is not a bird, but insect;
 - **A tallboy** is not a boy, but a piece of furniture;
 - **Bluestockings** – an old fashioned word is about a well-educated woman who is more interested in ideas and studying, who dedicates her life to science
 - **Bluebottle-** is not a bottle, it is a large fly with a blue body
 - **Butter-fingers** is a clumsy person often has accidents.
 - **Lady-finger** – a small long thin cake made with eggs, sugar and flour.

Seminar task:

- 1. Explain the different meanings and the different usages, giving Russian/Kazakh equivalents of:**

Smart, adj.

Smart clothes, a smart answer, a smart house, a smart garden, a smart officer, a smart blow, a smart punishment.

Stubborn, adj.

A stubborn child, a stubborn look, a stubborn horse, a stubborn resistance, a stubborn fighting, a stubborn cough, a stubborn depression.

Blank, adj.

Blank wall, blank verse, blank sheet, blank form, blank years, blank face, blank look.

Root, n.

The root of the tooth, the root of the matter, square root, cube root, family roots.

Perform, v.

To perform one's duty, to perform an operation, to perform a dance, to perform a play.



Seminar task:

2. Arrange the compounds into 2 groups: a) idiomatic, b) non-idiomatic. Say whether the semantic change within idiomatic compounds is partial or total.

Light-hearted, butterfly, flower-pot, backache, water-melon, cabman, blackberry, bluebell, wolf-dog, highway, horse-marine, greengrocer, lazy-bones, blacklist, butter-finger, earth-quake, lady-killer, seaman, sun-flower, ladybird, bluecoat, money-box, flower-bed, sunflower-seed, air-kiss, culture-vulture.



Seminar task:

3. Define the difference in meaning of the given compounds, possessing the change of distributional patterns. (Do the given task according to the following example).

The change of the order of its components will change its lexical meaning: vid-kid is “a kid who is a video fan” while kid-vid means “a video film for kids”.

Pot-flower – flower-pot, fruit-market – market-fruit,
boat-house – house-boat, school-grammar – grammar-school,
board-school – school-board.



SIW

Find 20 idiomatic compound words (partial and total) and give the complete analysis and translation.

