

LECTURE 2

**CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
WORD AS THE BASIC UNIT OF
THE LANGUAGE**

www.philology.bsu.by/кафедры/кафедра английского
языкознания/учебные материалы/кафедра английского
языкознания/папки преподавателей/Толстоухова В.Ф.

The questions under consideration

1. A word as a fundamental unit of language.
2. Motivation of words.
3. Functional style.
4. Informal style.
5. Colloquial words.
6. Slang.
7. Dialect words.
8. Learned words.
9. Archaic and obsolete words.
10. Professional terminology.
11. Basic vocabulary.

TEST 2

- **1. Give definitions to the following:**
- lexical system, syntagmatic relations, paradigmatic relations, a word, motivation, phonetic motivation, morphological motivation, semantic motivation, folk etymology, colloquial words, slang, dialect words, archaic and obsolete words, professional terminology, basic vocabulary.

Complete the following sentences using words and expressions given in the list below:

- A. The smallest meaningful units of the language are called
- B. The biggest units of morphology and the smallest units of syntax are
- C. A set of elements associated and functioning together according to certain laws is termed
- D. Contrastive relations of a lexical unit with all other units that can occur in the same context and be contrasted to it are known as

2. Complete the following sentences using words and expressions given in the list below:

- E. When there is a certain similarity between the sounds that make up words and their meaning, the motivation is
- P. Morphological motivation, when both the lexical meaning of the component morphemes and the meaning of the pattern are perfectly transparent, is called
- G. Motivation based on the co-existence of direct and figurative meaning of the same word within the same synchronous system is termed
- 1) lexical system; 2) semantic; 3) paradigmatic relations; 4) complete; 5) words; 6) phonetical; 7) morphemes.



3. Answer these questions

1. What determines the choice of stylistically marked words in each particular situation?
2. In what situations are informal words used?
3. What are the main kinds of informal words? Give a brief description of each group.
4. What is the difference between colloquialisms and slang? What are their common features? Illustrate your answer with examples.
5. What are the main features of dialect words?
6. Where are formal words used?

3. Answer these questions

1. Are learned words used only in books? Which type of learned words, do you think, is especially suitable for verbal communication? Which is least suitable and even undesirable?
2. What are the principal characteristics of archaic words?
3. What are the controversial problems connected with professional terminology?
4. Do you think that students of English should learn terms? If so, for which branch or branches of knowledge?
5. What is understood by the basic vocabulary?
6. Which classes of stylistically marked words should be included in the students' functional vocabulary?



1. A word as a fundamental unit of language.

- The term system (definition)

The term system

- denotes a set of elements associated and functioning together according to certain laws.



The lexical system of every epoch

- contains
 - **productive elements** typical of this particular period
 - others that are **archaic** and are dropping out of usage
 - some new phenomena, **neologisms**



The elements of lexical system

- are characterized
- by their combinatorial and contrastive properties determining their syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships.

EXAMPLE

- compare the meaning of the verb "to get" in the sentences
- *He got a letter.*
- *He got tired*
- *He got to London.*
- *He could not get the piano through the door.*

On the **syntagmatic level**,

- the semantic structure of the word is analysed in its **linear relationships** with neighbouring words in connected speech. In other words, the semantic characteristics of the word are observed, described and studied **on the basis of its typical contexts**.



Paradigmatic contrastive relations

- Where do they exist ?

Example:

- to go a mile
- to run a mile
- to walk a mile
- To stroll a mile

Paradigmatic contrastive relations

- exist between words belonging **to one subgroup of vocabulary items** (e.g., verbs of motion, of sense perception, sets of synonyms, etc.) that can occur **in the same context** and be contrasted to one another. Paradigmatic relations are observed in the system of language.



On the **paradigmatic level**

- the word is studied in its relationships with other words in the vocabulary system.
- So, a word may be studied in comparison with other words of similar meaning.

work *n* – labour *n*.

- **Work** работа, труд; **1** the job that a person does especially in order to earn money. This word has many meanings (*in Oxford Dictionary – 14*), many synonyms and idioms [*ˈidiəmz*]: **creative work** творческая деятельность; **public work** общественные работы; **his life`s work** дело его жизни; **dirty work** (*difficult, unpleasant*) **1** чёрная работа; **2** грязное дело, подлость. **Nice work!** Отлично! Здорово! **Saying** (*поговорка*): **All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy**
- **labour** – **1** work, especially physical work: *manual labour, a labour camp* – исправительно-трудовой лагерь; **2** people who work: *a shortage of labour; cheap labour; skilled labour* – квалифицированные рабочие, *Labour Party; labour relations; a labour of Sisyphus; Sisyphean labour* [*ˌsɪsɪˈfɪːn*] сизифов труд; тяжёлый и бесплодный труд – of a task impossible to complete

On the paradigmatic level

- words of similar meaning
- e.g. *to refuse v – to reject v*
- of opposite meaning (e.g. *busy adj – idle adj*;
- *to accept v – to reject v*)

On the paradigmatic level

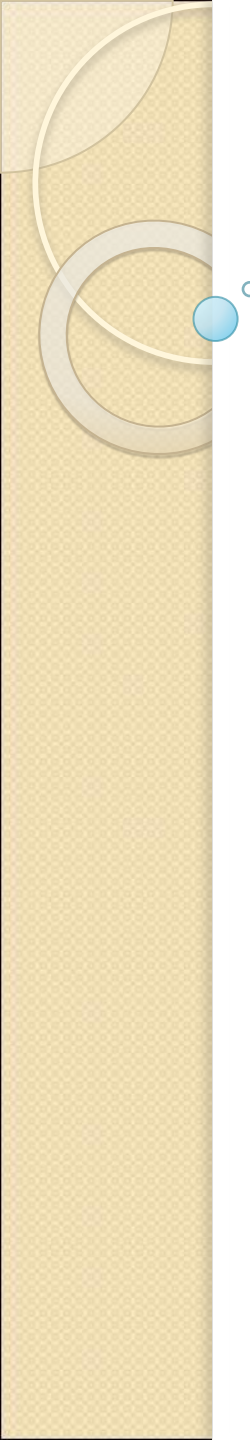
- of different stylistic characteristics

(e.g. *man n – chap n – bloke n – guy n*).

Man – chap (*coll.*) – парень, малый; **a good chap** – славный малый; **old chap** – старина; **chap** – *BrE*, informal, becoming old-fashioned – used to talk about a man in a friendly way: *He isn't such a bad chap really.*

Bloke (*coll.*) тип, парень: *He seemed like a nice bloke.*

Guy – *coll. US* – малый; **tough guy** железный малый; **wise guy** умник; **guys** (*informal, especially US*) a group of people of either sex: *Come on, you guys!*



The main problems of paradigmatic studies

- are **synonymy**,
- **antonymy**,
- **functional styles**.

Words vs Morphemes

- the central elements of language system
- the biggest units of morphology
- the smallest units of syntax
- can be separated in an utterance
- can be used in isolation as a complete utterance
- is composed of one or more morphemes
- are also meaningful units
- can not be used independently
- are always parts of words
- cannot be divided into smaller meaningful words



Why is the definition of a word the most difficult?

The simplest word has many different aspects:

- a sound form and morphological structure;
- may occur in different word-forms, different syntactic functions
- signal various meanings



Why is the definition of a word the most difficult?

- the word is a sort of focus for the problems of
 - phonology,
 - lexicology,
 - syntax,
 - morphology
- sciences that have to deal with language and speech, such as philosophy and psychology

The definition of a word

- The word has been defined semantically, syntactically, phonologically and by combining various approaches.

The definition of a word

- Many eminent scholars such as V.V. Vinogradov, A.I. Smirnitsky, O.S. Akhmanova, M.D. Stepanova, A.A. Ufimtseva contributed to creating a word theory. It is based upon the understanding of the relationship between word and thought, on the one hand, and language and society, on the other.

The definition of a word

- A word is the smallest unit of a given language capable of functioning alone and characterised by **positional mobility** within a sentence, **morphological un interruptability** and **semantic integrity**.

The definition of a word

- "a word is defined by the association of a particular meaning with a particular group of sounds capable of a particular grammatical employment." (A. Meillet. Linguistique historique et linguistique generate. Paris, 1926. V. 1. P. 30.)

2. Motivation of words.

- The term motivation is used to denote the relationship existing between the phonemic or morphemic composition and structural pattern of the word, on the one hand, and its meaning, on the other.

Three types of motivation

- **phonetical** motivation,
- **morphological** motivation
- **semantic** motivation

What motivation is it?

- e.g., *bump,*
- *buzz,*
- *chatter,*
- *clatter,*
- *giggle,*
- *hiss,*
- *whistle, etc.*

The **phonetical** motivation is

- when there is a certain **similarity** between **the sound** that make up words and **their meaning**.

morphological motivation

- The main criterion in **morphological** motivation is the relationship between, morphemes.
- e.g., "**endless**" is completely motivated as both the lexical meaning of the component morphemes and the meaning of the pattern are perfectly transparent.

morphological motivation

- "**cranberry**" is only partially motivated because of; the absence of the lexical meaning in the morpheme "cran-".
- The words "**matter**", "**repeat**" are non-motivated because the connection between the structure of the lexical unit and its meaning is completely conventional.

Semantic motivation

- is based on the co-existence of direct and figurative meaning of the same word within the same synchronous system.
- E.g., "**mouth**" denotes a part of a human face and can be metaphorically applied to any opening: *the mouth of a river, the mouth of a furnace, mouth of pipe.*

Semantic motivation

- Semantic motivation is clear in popular names of flowers, plants and birds
- *violet,*
- *bluebell,*
- *bluebottle,*
- *blackcap,*
- *blackbird,*
- *nightingale,*
- *hummingbird,* etc.

Semantic motivation

- As to compounds their motivation is morphological if the meaning of the whole is based on the direct meaning of the components (e.g., *headache* - *pain in the head*), and semantic if the combination of components is used figuratively (*headache* - *anything or anyone very annoying*).



folk etymology (popular etymology, false etymology)

- E.g. "mushroom" from French "moucheron" has nothing in common with "room" (a borrowed word)

3. Functional style (definition)

- "a system of expressive means peculiar to a specific sphere of communication".

(I.V. Arnold)

The suitability or unsuitability of a word for each particular situation depends on its stylistic characteristics or, in other words, on the **functional style** it represents.



Functional style (definition)

A system of expressive means peculiar to a specific sphere of communication.

By the sphere of communication scholars mean the circumstances attending the process of speech in each particular case: professional communication, a lecture, an informal talk, a formal letter, an intimate letter, a speech in court, etc.



Subdivisions of spheres of communications

- **formal** (a lecture, a speech in court, an official letter, professional communication)
- **informal** (an informal talk, an intimate letter).

4. Informal style (where?)

- Informal vocabulary is used in one's immediate circle: family, relatives, or friends. One uses informal words when at home or feeling at home.

Informal style (characteristics)

- relaxed,
- free-and-easy
- familiar

the informal talk differs

- well-educated people
- adults (the choice of words)
- people living in cities
- the illiterate or the semi-educated
- teenagers
- people living in the provinces
(regional words and expressions)

The choice of words

- is determined not only by informal and formal situations
- but by
 - speaker's educational background
 - speaker's cultural background
 - age group
 - occupational and regional characteristics

three types of informal words

- colloquial
- slang
- dialect words and word-groups

5. Colloquial words

(Where? By whom?)

- in everyday conversational speech both by cultivated and uneducated people of all age groups.

literary colloquial words

- appear in dialogues in which they realistically reflect the speech of modern people
- appear in descriptive passages as well (in modern fiction)

examples of literary colloquial words

- *Pal* (кореш, друг) and *chum* (приятель, дружок) are colloquial equivalents of *friend*; *girl*, when used colloquially, denotes a woman of any age;
- *bite* and *snack* (quick meal – перекусить) stand for *meal*;
- *hi*, *hello* are informal greetings, and *so long* a form of parting;
- *start*, *go on*, *finish* and *be through* (покончить)

examples of literary colloquial words

- A considerable number of shortenings are found among words of this type.

E.g. *pram, exam, fridge, flu, zip, movie.*

- Verbs with post-positional adverbs are also numerous among colloquialisms:

E.g. *put up, put over, make up, make out, turn up,*

literary colloquial words (are to be distinguished from)

- **familiar colloquial** words (by the young and the semi-educated)E.g. *doc* (for *doctor*), *ta-ta* (for *good-bye*), *to kid smb.* (for *tease, banter – подшутить*), *to pick up smb.* (for *make a quick and easy acquaintance*), *shut up* (for *keep silent*).
- **Low colloquial** (*просторечие*) (uncultivated people).

6.Slang

- The Oxford English Dictionary defines slang as “language of a highly colloquial style, considered as below the level of standard educated speech, and consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense.”

Slang

- All or most slang words are current words whose meanings have been metaphorically shifted. Each slang metaphor is rooted in a joke, but not in a kind or amusing joke. This is the criterion for distinguishing slang from colloquialisms: most slang words are metaphors and jocular, often with a coarse, mocking, cynical colouring.

Slang (the main reasons to use?)

- To be picturesque,
- To be arresting,
- To be striking
- To be different from others.
- To demonstrate one's spiritual independence and daring.
- To sound "modern" and "up-to-date".



Slang (who are users?)

The circle of users of slang is more narrow than that of colloquialisms.

It is mainly used by the young and uneducated.

7. Dialect words

- dialects are regional forms of English
Dialect is a variety of a language which prevails in a district, with local peculiarities of vocabulary, pronunciation and phrase.
(e.g. the Lancashire, Dorsetshire, Norfolk dialects).

Dialect words are constantly being incorporated into

- everyday colloquial speech or slang
 - into the common stock (words which are not stylistically marked)
 - a few of them even into formal speech
 - into the literary language
- e.g. Car, trolley, tram* began as dialect words.

Dialect words (examples)

- *tha (thee)* – the objective case of *thou*;
brass – money;
- *nivver* – never;
- *nowt* – nothing.



8. Learned words (two main groups):

- words associated with professional communication
- associated with the printed page. It is in this vocabulary stratum that poetry and fiction find their main resources.

Learned words (further subdivision)

- We find here numerous words that are used in **scientific prose** and can be identified by their dry, matter-of-fact flavour (e.g. *comprise, experimental, heterogeneous, homogeneous, conclusive, divergent*, etc).

Learned words

- **'officialese'** (канцеляризмы). These are the words of the official, bureaucratic language. They should be avoided in speech and in print, e.g. *assist* (for *help*), *endeavour* (for *try*), *proceed* (for *go*), *approximately* (for *about*), *sufficient* (for *enough*), *inquire* (for *ask*).

Learned words (further subdivision)

- the words found in **descriptive passages of fiction**. These words, which may be called 'literary', also have a particular flavour of their own, usually described as 'refined'. They are mostly polysyllabic words drawn from the Romance language and, though fully adapted to the English phonetic system, some of them continue to sound singularly foreign.

Learned words

- Here are some examples:
solitude=loneless, lonely place
(уединение, одиночество),
sentiment=feeling (чувство),
fascination=strong attraction
(очарование, обаяние), *delusion*
(заблуждение), *meditation*
(размышление), *cordial=friendly*
(сердечный, радушный).

Learned words (further subdivision)

- There is one further subdivision of learned words: modes of **poetic diction.**, Poetic words have a further characteristic – a lofty, sometimes archaic, colouring:

Examples of poetic words

“*Alas!* (*увы*) they had been friends in youth;
But whispering tongues can poison truth
And *constancy* (*постоянство*) lives in
realms (*царства*) above;
And life is thorny; and youth is vain...

Learned words (not only in printed page)

- Though learned words are mainly associated with the printed page, this is not exclusively so. Any educated English-speaking individual is sure to use many learned words not only in his formal letters and professional communication but also in his everyday speech. Educated people in both modern fiction and real life use learned words quite naturally and their speech is richer for it.

Learned words

- But on the other hand, utterances overloaded with such words are absurd and ridiculous.

Learned words and Writers

- Writers use this phenomenon for stylistic purposes. When a character in a book or in a play uses too many learned words, the obvious inappropriateness of his speech in an informal situation produces a comic effect.

Learned words

- However any suggestion that learned words are suitable only for comic purposes, would be quite wrong. It is in this vocabulary stratum that writers and poets find their most vivid paints and colours, and not only their humorous effects.

Learned words

- It is also true that some of these words should be carefully selected and “activized” to become part of the students’ functional vocabulary.

Without knowing some learned words, it is even impossible to read fiction (not to mention scientific articles) or to listen to lectures in the foreign language.



9. Archaic and obsolete words

Archaic – are old and no longer used words;

obsolete – no longer used because something new was invented. Obsolete words have completely gone out of use.

Archaic words

- are restricted to the printed page. These words are already partly or fully out of circulation. They are used in historical novels and in poetry which is rather conservative in its choice of words.
- *Thou* [θau] – (*ты*) and *thy* [ðai] – (*твой*), *aye* [ai] – ('yes') and *nay* [nei] – ('no') are certainly archaic and long since rejected by common usage, yet poets use them even today.

Archaic words

- Numerous archaisms can be found in Shakespeare, but it should be taken in consideration that what appear to us today as archaisms in the works of Shakespeare, are in fact examples of everyday language of Shakespeare's time.
- Further examples of archaisms are: *morn* (for *morning*), *eve* (for *evening*), *errant* (for *wandering*, e.g. *errant knights*), etc.

Archaic words

- Sometimes an archaic word may undergo a sudden revival. So, the formerly archaic *kin* (for *relatives; one's family*) is now current in American usage.

10. Professional terminology

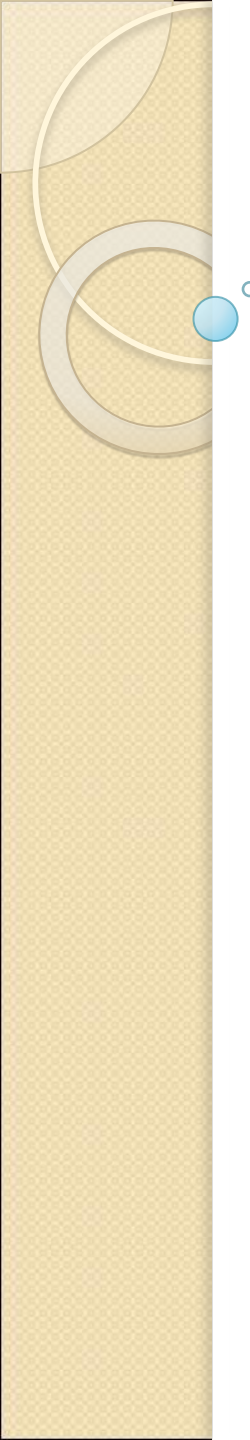
- Every field of modern activity has its specialized vocabulary, and similarly special terminologies for psychology, music, management, finance, economics, jurisprudence, linguistics and many others.

Professional terminology

- Term, as traditionally understood, is a word or a word-group which is specifically employed by a particular branch of science, technology, trade or the arts to convey a concept peculiar to his particular activity.

Professional terminology

- *So, share, bank, balance sheet* are finance terms;
- *court, lawyer, civil law* are legal terms; and *top manager, creative team, motivation* are used in management. *Bilingual, interdental, labialization, palatalization, glottal stop, descending scale* are terms of theoretical phonetics.



controversial problems in the field of terminology.

- a term loses its terminological status

It is quite natural that under circumstances numerous terms pass into general usage without losing connection with their specific fields.

Professional terminology

- There are **linguists** in whose opinion terms are only those words which have retained their exclusiveness and are not known or recognized outside their specific sphere. From this point of view, words associated with the medical sphere, such as *unit* (доза лекарственного препарата), *theatre* (операционная), *contact* (носитель инфекции) are no longer medical terms as they are in more or less common usage.

Professional terminology

- There is yet **another point of view**, according to which any terminological system is supposed to include all the words and word-groups conveying concept peculiar to a particular branch of knowledge, regardless of their exclusiveness. It would be wrong to regard a term as something “special” and standing apart.

polysemy and synonymy

- According to some linguists, an “ideal” term should be **monosemantic** (i.e. it should have only one meaning). **Polysemantic** terms may lead to misunderstanding, and that is a serious shortcoming in professional communication. This requirement seems quite reasonable, yet facts of the language do not meet it. There are numerous polysemantic terms.

synonymy

- The same is true about **synonymy** in terminological systems. There are scholars who insist that terms should not have synonyms because, consequently, scientists and other specialists would name the same objects and phenomena in their field by different terms and would not be able to come to any agreement. This may be true. But, in fact, terms do possess synonyms.

10. Basic vocabulary

- are stylistically neutral,
- used them in all kinds of situations, both formal and informal, in verbal and written communication
- are used every day, everywhere and by everybody, regardless of profession, occupation, educational level, age group or geographical location.

Basic vocabulary

- without them no human communication would be possible as they denote objects and phenomena of everyday importance (e.g. *house, bread, summer, child, mother, difficult, to go*, etc.).
- is the central group of the vocabulary, its historical foundation and living core.

Basic vocabulary

- Basic vocabulary words can be recognized not only by their stylistic neutrality but, also, by lack of other connotations (i.e. attendant meanings). Their meanings are broad, general and directly convey the concept, without supplying any additional information.

Basic vocabulary

- For instance, the verb *to walk* means merely 'to move from place to place on foot' whereas in the meanings of its synonyms *to stride* (шагать), *to stroll* (прогуливаться), *to trot* (семенить, бежать вприпрыжку), *to stagger* – *to sway while walking* (идти шатаясь) and others, some additional information is encoded as they each describe a different manner of walking, a different gait, tempo, purpose or lack of purpose.

Basic vocabulary

- **Basic vocabulary** 1.begin, 2.continue
3.end 4.child, baby
- **Informal** 1.start, get started 2.go on, get
on 3.finish, be through, be over 4.kid,
brat, bairn (dial.),
- **Formal** 1.commence 2.proceed 3.
terminate 4.infant, babe





