



THE INVESTIGATION OF SYNONYMS AND THEIR SEMANTIC AND FUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

Pazilova Nasibaxon Muhammadqosimovna
Docent, Andijan State Foreign Languages Institute
npazilova304@gmail.com

Annotation

This article is devoted to the investigation of synonyms which discusses lexical, semantic and factual meanings of synonyms. In addition, it analyzes semantic and functional relationships, words and their synonymy in Modern English.

Keywords: synonymy, polysemantic words, lexical meaning, monosemantic, denotational meaning, connotational meaning.

Synonyms (in ancient Greek *syn`* (with) and *onoma* (name)) are different words with similar or identical meanings and are interchangeable. An example of synonyms is the words *cat* and *feline*. Each describes any member of the family *Felidae*. Similarly, if we talk about a long time or an extended time, *long* and *extended* become synonyms. In the figurative sense, two words are often said to be synonymous if they have the same connotation:

Synonyms can be nouns, adverbs or adjectives, as long as both members of the pair are the same part of speech.

More examples of English synonyms:

baby and *infant* (noun)

student and *pupil* (noun)

pretty and *attractive* (adjective)

sick and *ill* (adjective)

interesting and *fascinating* (adjective)

quickly and *speedily* (adverb)

Note that the synonyms are defined with respect to certain senses of words; for instance, *pupil* as the “aperture in the iris of the eye” is not synonymous with *student*. Similarly, *expired* as “having lost validity” (as in grocery goods) it doesn’t necessarily mean death.

Some lexicographers claim that no synonyms have exactly the same meaning (in all contexts or social levels of language) because etymology, orthography, phonic qualities, ambiguous meanings, usage, etc. make them unique. However, many people feel that the synonyms they use are identical in meaning for all practical purposes.





Different words that are similar in meaning usually differ for a reason: feline is more formal than cat; long and extended are only synonyms in one usage and not in others, such as a long arm and an extended arm. Synonyms are also a source of euphemisms. The purpose of a thesaurus is to offer the user a listing of similar or related words; these are often, but not always, synonyms. In a way, hyponyms are similar to synonyms. In contrast, antonyms (an opposite pair) would be: dead and alive (compare to synonyms: dead and deceased), near and far (compare to synonyms: near and close), war and peace (compare to synonyms: war and armed conflict), tremendous and awful (compare to synonyms: tremendous and remarkable)

Warwick says that it isn't possible to distinguish semantic meaning and factual meaning. Her lexicographic descriptions are very lengthy because she has into account all knowledge of the world that is, the habitat, size, appearance, behavior, and relation to people.

S y n o n y m y is often understood as semantic equivalence it however can exist between words and word-groups, word groups and sentences, sentences and sentences. For example, John is taller than Bill is semantically equivalent to Bill is shorter than John. John sold the book to Bill and Bill bought the book from John may be considered semantically equivalent. As can be seen from the above these sentences are paraphrases and denote the same event. Semantic equivalence may be observed on the level of word-groups. Thus, we may say that to win a victory is synonymous with to gain a victory, etc.

Here we proceed from the assumption that the terms synonymy and synonyms should be confined to semantic relation between words only. Similar relations between word-groups and sentences are described as semantic equivalence. Synonyms may be found in different parts of speech and both among notional and function words. For example, though and albeit, on and upon, since and as are synonymous because these phonemically different words are similar in their denotational meaning. [7;147]

Synonyms are traditionally described as words different in sound-form but identical or similar in meaning. This definition has been severely criticized on many points. Firstly, it seems impossible to speak of identical or similar meaning of words as a such as this part of the definition cannot be applied to polysemantic words. It is inconceivable that polysemantic words could be synonymous in all their meanings. The verb look, e.g., is usually treated as a synonym of see, watch, observe, etc., but in another of its meanings it is not synonymous with this group of words but rather with the verbs seem, appear (cf. to look at smb and to look pale). The number of synonymic sets of a polysemantic word tends as a rule to be equal to the number of individual meanings the word possesses. In the discussion of polysemy and context we have seen





that one of the ways of discriminating between different meanings of a word is the interpretation of these meanings in terms of their synonyms, e.g. the two meanings of the adjective handsome are synonymously interpreted as handsome — ‘beautiful’ (usually about men) and handsome — ‘considerable, ample’ (about sums, sizes, etc.). Secondly, it seems impossible to speak of identity or similarity of lexical meaning as a whole as it is only denotational component that may be described as identical or similar. Synonymy words that are usually considered synonymous, e.g. to die, to pass away; to begin, to commence, etc., we find that the connotational [6;167] component or, to be more exact, the stylistic reference of these words is entirely different and it is only the similarity of the denotational meaning that makes them synonymous. The words, e.g. to die, to walk, to smile, etc., may be considered identical as to their stylistic reference or emotive charge, but as there is no similarity of denotational meaning they are never felt as synonymous words.

Thirdly, it does not seem possible to speak of identify of meaning as a criterion of synonymity since identity of meaning is very rare even among monosemantic [5;171-172] words. In fact, cases of complete synonymy are very few and are, as a rule, confined to technical nomenclatures where we can find monosemantic terms completely identical in meaning as, for example, spirant and fricative in phonetics. Words in synonymic sets are in general differentiated because of some element of opposition in each member of the set. The word handsome, e.g., is distinguished from its synonym beautiful mainly because the former implies the beauty of a male person or broadly speaking only of human beings, whereas beautiful is opposed to it as having no such restrictions in its meaning. Thus, it seems necessary to modify the traditional definition and to formulate it as follows: synonyms are words different in sound-form but similar in their denotational meaning or meanings. Synonymous relationship is observed only between similar denotational meanings of phonemically different words.

Differentiation of synonyms may be observed in different semantic components — denotational or connotational. It should be noted, however, that the difference in denotational meaning cannot exceed certain limits, and is always combined with some common denotational component. The verbs look, seem, appear, e.g., are viewed as members of one synonymic set as all three of them possess a common denotational semantic component “to be in one’s view, or judgement, but not necessarily in fact” and come into comparison in this meaning (cf. he seems (looks), (appears), tired). A more detailed analysis shows that there is a certain difference in the meaning of each verb: seem suggests a personal opinion based on evidence (e.g. nothing seems right when one is out of sorts); look implies that opinion is based on a





visual impression (e.g. the city looks its worst in March), appear sometimes suggests a distorted impression (e.g. the setting sun made the spires appear ablaze). Thus, similarity of denotational meaning of all members of the synonymic series is combined with a certain difference in the meaning of each member.

It follows that relationship of synonymy implies certain differences in the denotational meaning of synonyms. In this connection a few words should be said about the traditional classification of vocabulary units into ideographic and stylistic synonyms. This classification proceeds from the assumption that synonyms may differ either in the denotational meaning (ideographic synonyms) or the connotational meaning, or to be more exact stylistic reference. This assumption cannot be accepted as synonymous words always differ in the denotational component. Thus, buy and purchase are similar in meaning but differ in their stylistic reference and therefore are not completely interchangeable. Thus, a more acceptable definition of synonyms seems to be the following: synonyms are words different in their sound-form but similar in their denotational meaning or meanings and interchangeable at least in some contexts.

The English word-stock is extremely rich in synonyms which can be largely accounted for by abundant borrowing. Quite a number of words in synonymic sets are usually of Latin or French origin. For instance, out of thirteen words making up the set see, behold, descry, espy, view, survey, contemplate, observe, notice, remark, note, discern, perceive only see and behold can be traced back to Old English [4;284] (*OE.* seon and behealdan), all others are either French or Latin borrowings.

Thus, a characteristic pattern of English synonymic sets is the pattern including the native and the borrowed words. Among the best investigated are the so-called double-scale patterns: native versus Latin (e.g. bodily — corporal, brotherly — fraternal); native versus Greek or French (e.g. answer — reply, fiddle — violin). In most cases the synonyms differ in their stylistic reference, too. The native word is usually colloquial (e.g. bodily, brotherly), whereas the borrowed word may as a rule be described as bookish or highly literary (e.g. corporal, fraternal).

Side by side with this pattern there exists in English a subsidiary one based on a triple-scale of synonyms; native — French, and Latin or The Use of English. Patterns of Synonymic Sets in Modern English Greek (e.g. begin (start) — commence (*Fr.*) — initiate (*L.*); rise — mount (*Fr.*) — ascend (*L.*). In most of these sets the native synonym is felt as more colloquial, the Latin or Greek one is characterized by bookish stylistic reference, whereas the French stands between the two extremes. There are some minor points of interest that should be discussed in connection with the problem of synonymy. It has often been found that subjects prominent in the interests





of a community tend to attract a large number of synonyms. It is common knowledge that in “Beowulf” there are 37 synonyms for hero and at least a dozen for battle and fight. The same epic contains 17 expressions for sea to which 13 more may be added from other English poems of that period. In Modern American English there are at least twenty words used to denote money: beans, bucks, the chips, the needful, wherewithal, etc. This linguistic phenomenon is usually described as the law of synonymic attraction. It has also been observed that when a particular word is given a transferred meaning its synonyms tend to develop along parallel lines. We know that in early New English the verb overlook was employed in the meaning of look with an evil eye upon, cast a spell over’ from which there developed the meaning ‘deceive’ first recorded in 1596. Exactly half a century later we find oversee a synonym of overlook employed in the meaning of ‘deceive’. This form of analogy active in the semantic development of synonyms is referred to as radiation of synonyms. Another feature of synonymy is that the bulk of synonyms may be referred to stylistically marked words, i.e. they possess a peculiar connotational component of meaning. This can be observed by examining the synonyms for the stylistically neutral word money listed above. Another example is the set of synonyms for the word girl (young female): doll, flame, skirt, tomato, broad, bag, dish, etc. all of which are stylistically marked. Many synonyms seem to possess common emotive charge. Thus, it was found that according to Roget 244 synonyms of the word whiteness imply something favorable. This article is also devoted to the analysis of semantic and functional relationships and words and their synonymy in modern English. V.G. Vilyuman, in detail analyzing all signs of synonymy, comes to conclusion that necessary and sufficient for confession of the words as the synonymical ones features are general for the analyzed words semantic and functional signs, but, however, the problem of synonymy according to Volumes opinion is being lead to the discovering of resemblances and differences of the meanings and functions of the words on the base of their combinability [3; 89-90]. This idea might be truly supported by the investigations of other linguists such as A.V. Smirnitsky and G. Khidekel. We must also notion here that the understanding of the essence of the synonymous relations is closely connected with the understanding of the essence and structures of the semantic structure of a word. We know different ways of interpretations of the semantic structure of the word in theories of lexicology. Let us give some of these suggestions below.

V.G. Viluman defines the semantic structure of the word as a set of semantic signs, which are revealed at the determination of semantic adjacency of the synonymic words. According to his opinion, one of the possible ways of the determination of





semantic adequacy of the words is offered by the analysis of the description of meanings for these words in explanatory dictionaries. Two words are considered as semantically correspondent to each other if their vocabulary meaning is explained one through another. The relationship between two words can also be direct and mediated. For example, having studied the semantic relationship between verbs which are united by the semantic meaning of “to look”, V.G. Vilyuman builds the matrix of the semantic structures of the synonymic verbs analyzed. The matrix presentation of the semantic structures serves not only as a demonstrative depiction of the material, but it also creates the picture a unit systems in a language - we mean synonymy, since the semantic structure of each word in the matrix is represented by itself as a ranked ensemble of importance interconnected and opposed to each other. The deep penetration to the essence of language phenomena, their nature and laws of the development is promoted by the collation of these phenomena in two and more languages. The problems of the comparative study of lexicon in different languages have found their reflected images in the works of such kind famous lexicologists as A.V. Scherba, R.A. Budagov, V.G. Gak, B.A. Uspensky, V.N. Yartseva, Sh. Balley, S. Uliman, U. Veinrich, A.V. Smirnitsky and the others.[9;119-122].

Many linguists consider as expedient to match the small systems between themselves, the members of which are semantically bound between itself. This enables us to define the lexical elements of each system by means of investigation, and to note the moments of the coincidences between them, as well as to explain why the semantic sidebars of each word or words, which have the alike subject reference in compared languages, are turned out to be different. The comparative studies also serve as the base for typological investigations, the production of typological universals, since, as a result of such correspondences, are identically and non-identically fixed with the determined standpoint elements. Thereby, we see that the problem of synonymy was studied and is being studied, but, regrettably, the majority of the studies in this area belong to the foreign lexicologists, especially by the Russian ones. In Uzbekistan the studding of the problem of synonymy is investigated by a relatively small quantity of lexicologists. The following chapter of my qualification work studies the verbal synonymy, which is one of the most fully studied problems concerned with linguistics at all and the problems of synonymy in particular. Considering the semantic generality of the lexical units and their partial interchangeability as the features of synonyms, that is to say, the compatibility of words in one contextual meaning and the inconsistency in others, we hereunder may confirm that two words interchangeable in all contexts are not synonyms, because when two words are used with no difference, there is no a problem of the choice between them





Synonymy of the words - a stylistic category and the style always expects the choice between two words, at least, which are compatible or incompatible.[9;276-278] Hence it follows that where there are no grounds for choice between two or more words, there are no grounds for speaking about synonymy of these words.

Amongst the judgments about correlation of meanings in synonymy and their interchangeable character, there are such, which reduce the synonymy to unlimited interchange. For instance if two names (the question is about the names presented as combinations of the words) are synonyms (that is they have one and the same content), it is always possible for a linguist to change one of them into another. However, example, , shows that the interchangeable character of synonyms is limited. This example looks as follows: e.g. Sir Valiter Scott is the author of “Veverley” In this example we can see that though Sir Walter Scott is not a Veverley by its semantic content but Sir Walter Scott is Sir Walter Scott, though when we say a word “Veverley” we may mention Walter Scott as the author of the former.

In the linguistic literature on synonymy we can read that the interchangeable character of lexical units is considered as the effect to generalities of their lexical and grammatical importance. For support of this idea we can take the works of A.L. Demidova, who, concerning with synonymical pretext, comes to conclusion that some synonyms differ in their semantically meaning and cannot be interchanged to each other, while the others are of stylistic shade and can be interchanged into each other. I agree with A.L. Demidovas idea is that there also exists the third group of synonyms, which combines in itself the features of the first two previous groups. And, consequently, such synonyms are interchangeable in one case and not interchangeable in another.

According to concepts accepted by me, the synonymy exists only under the two above mentioned conditions of semantic generality, while the words which correspond only to one of these conditions, are not of synonymic character.

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