Synonyms in English

Synonym

- Has developed as a term from a coinage of two Greek morphemes: **syn** (συν) – *plus* and **onoma** (όνομα) – *name*

- Means *a word of similar or identical meaning to one or more words in the same language*.

- *All languages contain synonyms but in English they exist in superabundance.*

Synonymy

- Is the coincidence in the essential meanings of identical linguistic elements;
- However, words with identical semantic elements preserve their differences in connotations and stylistic characteristics (*to be described below*).

Synonyms: the Problem of Definition

- In traditional linguistics synonyms are defined on the basis of the *notional criterion*.

- According to it synonyms are *words of the same category of parts of speech conveying the same notion, but differing either in shades of meaning or in stylistic characteristics* (V.V. Vinogradov).

Synonyms: the Problem of Definition

- The definition of synonyms based on the *semantic criterion* runs as follows:

- Lexical synonyms are *different words of the same part of speech which have some common denotational component(s) in their semantic structure, but differ either in some other denotational component(s) or in some connotational component(s) and thus usually have different lexical collocability* (E.B. Cherkasskaya).

Synonyms: the Problem of Definition

- In modern research on synonyms the *criterion of interchangeability* is also applied.
- According to it, synonyms are defined as *words which are interchangeable at least in some contexts without any considerable alteration in the denotational meaning*.
- The application of this criterion is however limited.

Synonyms: the Problem of Definition (summing up)

- Synonyms can therefore be defined in terms of linguistics as two or more words of the same language,
- belonging to the same part of speech and possessing one or more identical or nearly identical denotational meanings,
- interchangeable, at least, in some contexts,
- differing in morphemic composition, phonemic shape, connotations, affective value, style, valence and idiomatic use.

Hope / expectation / anticipation

- **Denotational meaning (common)**: *having something in mind which is likely to happen.*

- **Evaluative connotation**: *expectation* may be either of good or of evil, *anticipation*, as a rule, is a pleasurable expectation of something good, *hope* is not only a belief but a desire that some event would happen.

- **Stylistic difference**: the Romance words *anticipation* and *expectation* are formal literary words used only by educated speakers, whereas the native monosyllabic *hope* is stylistically neutral.

- **Idiomatic usage:** only *hope* is possible in such set expressions as: *to hope against hope, to lose hope, to pin one's hopes on smth, etc.* Thus, neither *expectation* nor *anticipation* could be substituted into the following quotation from T. S. Eliot: You do not know what *hope* is until you have *lost it*.

How do Synonyms Appear in the Language?

- Due to extensive *borrowings* from other languages: city /French/ - town /native/; chair /French/ - stool /native/, etc.

- Due to *abbreviation* (in most cases the abbreviated form belongs to the colloquial style, and the full form to the neutral style): examination – exam, laboratory – lab, etc.

- Due to the appearance of *euphemisms* (words used to substitute in speech some unpleasant or offensive words): «the late» instead of «the dead», «to perspire» instead of «to sweat», etc.

How do Synonyms Appear in the Language?

● Due to the coexistence and co-usage of *words belonging to different dialects and language varieties*:

● Boat (English) – coracle (Welsh)

● Girl (English) – colleen (Irish)

● Lift (BrEng) – elevator (AmEng)

● Autumn (BrEng) – fall (AmEng), etc.

How do Synonyms Appear in the Language?

- Due to the *formation of phrasal verbs*, e.g. «to give up» - «to abandon», «to cut down» - «to diminish».

- There are *phraseological synonyms* which are expressed by phrases similar semantically but different from the point of their pragmatics:

- We say «to be late (for a lecture)» but «to miss (the train)».

Groups of Synonyms

- Synonyms enter groups, which are referred to as *synonymic sets*.

- Each synonymic set has a word which expresses the most general idea and holds a commanding position over other words, it is called the *synonymic dominant*:

- *See*, view, behold, perceive, etc.

- *Main*, chief, crucial, critical, essential, etc.

Functions of Synonyms

- Synonyms have three main functions in speech:
  - the function of **substitution**;
  - the function of **precision** of meaning;
  - the **expressive** or **stylistic** function.

Classification of Synonyms

- Absolute

- Ideographic

- Stylistic

Absolute Synonyms

- Words totally identical in their inner aspect (the denotational meaning, connotations, emotive and stylistic charge);

- They can replace each other in any given context without the slightest alteration in the denotational or emotional meaning and connotations;

- They are a rare occasion and are found mostly in terminology or among special words: *noun* and *substantive*, *functional affix, flection* and *inflection*).

Ideographic Synonyms

- Words bearing the same idea but not being identical in their referential content:
- *to ascent – to mount – to climb*
- *to happen – to occur – to befall – to chance*
- *look – appearance – complexion – countenance, etc.*

Stylistic Synonyms

- are distinguished stylistically, i.e. in all kinds of emotional, expressive and evaluative overtones without explicitly displaying semantic difference:

- *child (neutral) – infant (elevated) – kid (colloquial)*

- *die (neutral) – pass away (elevated) – kick the bucket (colloquial)*

Other Types of Synonyms

- **Contextual Synonyms**
- Context can emphasize certain semantic traits & suppress other semantic traits of words; thus words with different meaning can become synonyms in a certain context: *tasteless – dull, active – curious, curious – responsive, etc*.
- **Referential Synonyms**
- a vague term, which concerns co-referential expressions, when one denotatum can be defined differently from different points of view and in different aspects: e.g. names *Walter Scott* and *the author of 'Ivanhoe'* are co-referential because they refer to one and the same denotatum – Sir Walter Scott;

Synonymic condensation

- Is typical of the English language and refers to situations when writers or speakers bring together several words with one & the same meaning to add more conviction or to make the description more vivid:
- *Safe & sound*
- *Lord & master*
- *First & foremost*
- *Safe & secure*
- *Stress & strain*
- *By force & violence*
- It is deeply rooted in the history of English language since it was customary to use French borrowings together with their native synonyms, especially those which are characterized by alliteration and rhymes.

Antonyms

- Words of the same part of speech which are opposite in meaning.
- Not every word of a language may have an antonym though practically every word may have a synonym.
- As is with synonyms, different lexical-semantic variants of a word have different antonyms:
- *Light – dark, light – heavy;*
- *Bright – dim, bright – unintelligent, etc*.

Antonyms: to the Problem of Definition

- Antonyms may be defined as two or more words of the same part of speech which have some common denotational components in their semantic structure, but express some contrary or contradictory (contrasting) notions;

- They are characterized by different types of semantic contrast of the denotational meaning and interchangeability at least in some contexts.

Types of Antonyms

● According to the relationship between the notions expressed antonyms are divided into

● *contradictories (intelligent – stupid, peaceful – stormy, etc.)* and

● *contraries (up – down, give – take, etc.)*.

● According to their morphological structure antonyms may be subdivided into

● *root antonyms (intelligent - stupid)* and

● *derivational antonyms (intelligent - unintelligent)*.

Thank you for your attention!