



# MOTIVATION AND SEMANTIC CHANGE

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## LECTURE 3

# **MOTIVATION & SEMANTIC CHANGE**

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## **I. WORD-MEANING AND MOTIVATION.** **TYPES OF MOTIVATION**

## **II. SEMANTIC CHANGE:**

**1. CAUSES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE**

**2. NATURE OF SEMANTIC CHANGE**

**3. RESULTS OF SEMANTIC CHANGE**

# I. WORD-MEANING AND MOTIVATION

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*The inner form* is pivotal point in the lexical meaning which helps to get an insight into the features chosen as the basis for nomination.

*Motivation* is used to denote the relationship between the phonetic or morphemic composition and structural pattern of the word on the one hand, and its meaning on the other.

# TYPES OF MOTIVATION

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## 1. *Phonetical motivation*

implies a direct connection between the phonetic structure of the word and its meaning, e.g.

*cuckoo* denotes a bird whose call is like its name. Other words:

*moo, mew, buzz, hiss.*

# *Phonetical motivation*

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1. a direct connection between the phonetical structure of the word and its meaning.

Speech sounds may suggest spatial and visual dimensions, shape, size, etc.

2. a direct imitation of the sounds these words denote: *swish (свист), sizzle (шипение), boom (гуд), splash (плеск).*

## *Phonetical motivation*

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- Initial [f] and [p] are felt as expressing scorn (пренебрежение), contempt (презрение), disapproval or disgust which can be illustrated by the words *pooh! fie! fiddle-sticks, flim-flam* and the like.
- The sound-cluster [ɪŋ] is ‘imitative of sound or swift movement as can be seen in words *ring, sing, swing, fling*, etc. Thus, phonetically such words may be considered motivated.

# Phonetical symbolism

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- these are the onomatopoeic, imitative or echoic words such as the English: *cuckoo*, *splash* and *whisper*.
- The sound-cluster [in] which is supposed to be imitative of sound or swift movement (*ring*, *swing*) is also observed in semantically different words, e.g. *thing*, *king*, and others.

## 2. Morphological motivation

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implies a direct connection between the lexical meaning of the component morphemes, the pattern of their arrangement and the meaning of the word.


e.g. the derived word *to rethink* is motivated through its morphological structure which suggests the idea of ‘thinking again’.




# The main criterion in morphological motivation is the relationship between morphemes

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- 📧 All one-morpheme words, e.g. *sing*, *tell*, *eat*, are by definition non-motivated.
- 📧 In words composed of more than one morpheme the carrier of the word-meaning is the combined meaning of the component morphemes and the meaning of the structural pattern of the word: *finger-ring* and *ring-finger*.


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- Words that have a direct connection between the structural pattern of the word and its meaning, are motivated: *singer*, *rewrite*, *eatable*, etc.
  - If the connection between the structure of the lexical unit and its meaning is completely arbitrary and conventional, we speak of non-motivated or idiomatic words, e.g. *matter*, *repeat*.



Morphological motivation is “relative”, i.e.  
the degree of motivation may be different.

Between the extremes of complete motivation  
and lack of motivation, there exist various  
grades of partial motivation. The word  
*endless*, e.g., is completely motivated as  
both the lexical meaning of the component  
morphemes and the meaning of the pattern  
is perfectly transparent.

The word *cranberry* is only partially  
motivated because of the absence of the  
lexical meaning in the morpheme *cran-*.

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- A synchronic approach to morphological motivation presupposes historical changeability of structural patterns and the ensuing degree of motivation:  
*Newtowns* and *Wildwoods* are lexically and structurally motivated.
  - *Essex, Norfolk, Sutton* are non-motivated.
  - *East+Saxon, North+Folk* and *South+Town* show that in earlier days they were just as completely motivated as *Newtowns* or *Wildwoods*.

3. *Semantic motivation* implies a direct connection between the central and marginal meanings of the word

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e.g. the compound noun *eyewash* has two meanings:

1. *a lotion for the eyes* (примочка) – morphological motivation;
2. *something said or done to deceive a person so that he thinks what he sees is good though in fact it is not* (очковтирательство) – semantic motivation.

## II. SEMANTIC CHANGE

*Semantic change* – change in the meaning of words in the course of their development.

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*Fond* (OE *fond*) – ‘foolish’, foolishly credulous’;

*Glad* (OE *glaed*) – ‘bright’, ‘shining’.

Every word in its development has undergone many semantic changes.


There are distinguished *causes* of semantic change, *nature* and *results* of the process of change of meaning.




## 2.1. CAUSES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE


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**Historical** or **Extra-linguistic causes** are various changes in the life of speech community, i.e. changes in economic and social structure or scientific concepts.

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- When the first textile factories appeared in England, the old word *mill* was applied to these early industrial enterprises. In this way, *mill* (a Latin borrowing of the first century B. C.) added a new meaning to its former meaning "a building in which corn is ground into flour". The new meaning was "textile factory".
  - A similar case is the word *carriage* which had (and still has) the meaning "a vehicle drawn by horses", but, with the first appearance of railways in England, it received a new meaning, that of "a railway car".



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- The words *stalls, box, pit, circle* had existed for a long time before the first theatres appeared in England. With their appearance, the gaps in the vocabulary were easily filled by these widely used words which, as a result, developed new meanings

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- E.g. changes in the way of life of the British brought about changes in the meaning *hlaford* meant ‘bread-keeper’

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(хранитель хлеба) and later on ‘master, ruler’ (повелитель, лорд).
  - The word *car*, e.g., ultimately goes back to Latin *carrus* which meant ‘a four-wheeled wagon’ (ME. *carre*) but now that other means of transport are used it denotes ‘a motor-car’, ‘a railway carriage’ (in the USA), ‘that portion of an airship, or balloon which is intended to carry personnel, cargo or equipment’.


# Linguistic causes

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are factors acting within the language system.

1. *ellipsis* – the omission of one word in a phrase, e.g. the verb *to starve* in OE meant ‘to die’ and was habitually used in collocation with the word *hunger* (ME *sterven of hunger*).


Later this verb itself acquired the meaning ‘to die of hunger’.




2. *discrimination/differentiation of synonyms*, e.g. in OE the word *land* meant both ‘solid of earth’s surface’ and ‘the territory of a nation’.

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In the ME period the word *country* was borrowed as its synonym. The meaning of the word *land* was altered and ‘the territory of a nation’ came to be denoted by the borrowed word *country*.

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- The history of the noun *deer* is essentially the same. In Old English *deor* it had a general meaning denoting any beast. In that meaning it collided with the borrowed word *animal* and changed its meaning to the modern one ("a certain kind of beast", R. *олень*).
  - The noun *knave* (O. E. *knafa*) suffered an even more striking change of meaning as a result of collision with its synonym *boy*. Now it has a pronounced negative evaluative connotation and means "swindler, scoundrel".

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3. One more linguistic cause of semantic change is called *fixed context*.

E.g. the word *token* brought into competition with the word *sign* and became restricted in use to a number of set expressions, such as *love token*, *token of respect* etc. and also became specialized in meaning.



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## CAUSES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE

**Extra-linguistic**

**Linguistic**

**Ellipsis**

**differentiation of synonyms**

**fixed**

**context**

## 2.2. NATURE OF SEMANTIC CHANGE

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A necessary condition of any semantic change is some connection, some association between the old meaning and the new one. There are two kinds of association involved in various semantic changes:

- a) similarity / resemblance of meanings;
- b) contiguity of meanings.





*Similarity* / *resemblance* of meanings or

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*metaphor* may be described as the semantic process of associating two referents, one of which in some way resembles the other.


E.g. *hand* – ‘a point of a clock’ (16<sup>th</sup> century).


‘the *leg* of the table’,

‘the *foot* of the hill’

*Warm / cold voice*


- *Eye* - "hole in the end of a needle"
  - *Neck of a bottle.*
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- *Drop* - "a small particle of water or other liquid", => "ear-rings shaped as drops of water" (e. g. *diamond drops*) and "candy of the same shape" (e. g. *mint drops*).
  - *Branch* is "limb or subdivision of a tree or bush" => "a special field of science or art" (as in *a branch of linguistics*).


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- The noun *bar* from the original meaning *barrier* developed a figurative meaning realised in such contexts as *social bars*, *colour bar*, *racial bar*.
  - The noun *star* on the basis of the meaning "heavenly body" developed the meaning "famous actor or actress". Nowadays the meaning has considerably widened its range, and the word is applied not only to screen idols (as it was at first), but, also, to popular sportsmen (e. g. *football stars*), *pop-singers*, etc.

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- A red-headed boy is almost certain to be nicknamed *carrot* or *ginger* by his schoolmates, and the one who is given to spying and sneaking gets the derogatory nickname of *rat*.
  - The slang meanings of words such as *nut*, *onion* (= *head*), *saucers* (= *eyes*), *hoofs* (== *feet*) and very many others were all formed by transference based on resemblance.

- *Contiguity* of meanings or *metonymy* may be described as the semantic process of associating two referents one of which makes part of the other or is closely connected with it.
- *Tongue* – ‘the organ of speech’ in the meaning of ‘language’ – **mother tongue**.
- *Bench* – ‘judges’;
- *The House* – ‘members of the House’ (Parliament).
- *Glad* meant "bright, shining" (it was applied to the sun, to gold and precious stones, to shining armour, etc.) => "joyful" (cf. with the R. *светлое настроение; светло на душе*).


1. **Sad** (OE "satisfied with food" (*сѣм(ьнѣ)*) =>  
"oversatisfied with food; having eaten too much". =>  
**Sad** developed a negative evaluative connotation "the  
physical unease and discomfort of a person who has  
had too much to eat". =>
3. **Sad** – "physical discomfort into one of spiritual  
discontent" =>
4. **Sad** "melancholy", "sorrowful" developed, and the  
adjective describes now a purely emotional state. The  
two previous meanings ("satisfied with food" and  
"having eaten too much") were ousted from the  
semantic structure of the word long ago.

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- The *foot* of a bed is the place where the feet rest when one lies in the bed, but the *foot of a mountain* is its lowest part.
  - By the *arms* of an arm-chair we mean the place where the arms lie when one is sitting in the chair.
  - The *leg* of a bed (table, chair, etc.) is the part which serves as a support, the original meaning being "the leg of a man or animal".
  - The association that lies behind this development of meaning is the common function: a piece of furniture is supported by its legs just as living beings are supported by theirs.

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- The meaning of *hand* realised in such contexts as *factory hands, farm hands* is based on another kind of association: strong, skilful hands are the most important feature that is required of a person engaged in physical labour (cf. with the R. *рабочие руки*).



- *Board* (OE) "a flat and thin piece of wood; a wooden plank". On the basis of this meaning developed the meaning "table". The association which underlay this semantic shift was that of the material and the object made from it: a wooden plank (or several planks) is an essential part of any table. This type of association is often found with nouns denoting clothes: e. g. *a mink* ("mink coat"), *a jersey* ("knitted shirt or sweater").

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- *China* in the sense of "dishes made of porcelain" originated from the name of the country which was believed to be the birthplace of porcelain.
  - *Tweed* ("a coarse wool cloth") got its name from the river Tweed and *cheviot* (another kind of wool cloth) from the Cheviot hills in England.
  - The name of a painter is frequently transferred onto one of his pictures: *a Matisse — a painting by Matisse*



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## **NATURE OF SEMANTIC CHANGES**

**Similarity of meanings  
meaning**

**METAPHOR**

**Contiguity of**

**METONYMY**

### III. RESULTS OF SEMANTIC CHANGE

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Results of semantic change can be generally observed in the changes of the denotational meaning of the word (**restriction** and **extension of meaning**) or in the alteration of its connotational component (**amelioration** and **deterioration of meaning**).

# 1. Changes of the denotational meaning


## 1. Restriction of meaning

E.g. *hound* used to denote ‘dog of any breed’ but now denotes only ‘a dog used in the chase’.

*Fowl* (OE ‘any bird’) – Modern E ‘a domestic hen or cock’

If the word with a new restricted meaning comes to be used in the specialized vocabulary of some limited group within the speech community it is usual to speak of *the specialization of meaning*.

E.g. *to glide* (OE. *glidan*) which had the meaning ‘to move gently and smoothly’ and has now acquired a restricted and specialised meaning ‘to fly with no engine’

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- *Lady* (OE *hlæfdiZe*) denoted the mistress of the house, i. e. any married woman =>

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  - (Middle E) : "the wife or daughter of a baronet" (aristocratic title) =>
  - (ME) any woman.
  - In ME the difference between *girl* and *lady* in the meaning of *woman* is that the first is used in colloquial style and sounds familiar whereas the second is more formal and polite.

# Here are some more examples of narrowing (restriction) of meaning:

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- *Deer*: [ any beast ] => [ a certain kind of beast ]
- *Meat*: [ any food ] => | a certain food product [
- *Boy*: | any young person of the male sex ]  
=>  
[ servant of the male sex ]

## 2. *Extension of meaning*

may be illustrated by the word *target* which originally meant ‘a small round shield’ but now means ‘anything that is fired at’.

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If the word with extended meaning passed from the specialized vocabulary into common use, the result of the semantic change is described as *generalization of meaning*.


E.g. *camp* is used to denote ‘the place where troops are lodged in tents’, now it denotes ‘temporary quarters’



- *to arrive* (French borrowing) "to come to shore, to land" =>
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- In Modern English it means "to come":  
*to arrive in a village, town, city, country, at a hotel, hostel, college, theatre, place, etc.*). The meaning developed through transference based on contiguity (the concept of coming somewhere is the same for both meanings), but the range of the second meaning is much broader.

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- *Pipe* (OE) "a musical wind instrument".  
=>
  - (ME) "any hollow oblong cylindrical body" (e.g. *water pipes*).
  - *bird* (OE) "the young of a bird" to its modern meaning "any bird" through transference based on contiguity (the association is obvious). The second meaning is broader and more general.

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1. *Girl* (Middle English) "a small child of either sex" =>
  2. ~~"a small child of the female sex", so that the range of meaning was somewhat narrowed => .~~
  3. the word gradually broadened its range of meaning =>
  4. female child / a young unmarried woman, =>
  5. any young woman =>
  6. In Modern colloquial English it is practically synonymous to the noun *woman* (e. g. *The old girl must be at least seventy*), so that its range of meaning is quite broad.

# Changes of the denotational meaning

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**Specialization**



**Generalization**



## 2. Changes of the connotational meaning

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*Amelioration* of meaning implies the improvement of the connotational component of meaning, e.g. the word *minister* originally denoted ‘a servant’ but now – ‘a civil servant of higher rank, a person administering a department of state’.

1. *Fond*: foolish => loving, affectionate

2. *Nice*: foolish => fine, good

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1. *Tory*: brigand, highwayman => member of Tories.

2. *Knight*: manservant => noble, courageous man

1. *Marshal*: manservant attending horses => the highest rank in the army


2. *Lord*: master of the house, head of the family => baronet (aristocratic title)

3. *Lady*: mistress of the house, married woman => wife or daughter of baronet



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**Deterioration** of the meaning  
implies the acquisition by the  
word of some derogatory  
emotive charge, e.g. the word  
*boor* was originally to denote ‘a  
peasant’ and then acquired a  
derogatory connotational  
meaning and came to denote ‘a  
clumsy or ill-bred fellow’.

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- *Knave*: boy => swindler, scoundrel
  - *Villain*: farm-servant, serf => base, vile person
  - *Gossip*: god parent => the one who talks scandal; tells slanderous stories about other people



# RESULTS OF SEMANTIC CHANGE


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**Change  
of the denotational  
component**

Restriction      Extension  
of meaning

**Change  
of the connotational  
component**

Deterioration      Amelioration  
of meaning



In derivational clusters a change in the connotational meaning of one member does not necessarily affect the others.

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E.G. *accident* and *accidental*.

The lexical meaning of the noun *accident* has undergone pejorative development and denotes not only 'something that happens by chance', but usually 'something unfortunate'.


The derived adjective *accidental* does not possess in its semantic structure this negative connotational meaning (cf. also fortune: *bad fortune*, *good fortune* and *fortunate*).



## Conclusion:

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1. The meaning of the word is changed in the course of the historical development of language. The factors causing semantic changes are subdivided into **extra-linguistic** and **linguistic**.
2. Change of meaning is effected through association between the existing meaning and the new. This association is based on the **similarity** of meaning (**metaphor**) or on the **contiguity** of meaning (**metonymy**).

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3. Semantic changes in the denotational component may bring about the **extension** or the **restriction** of meaning.
  4. The change in the connotational component may result in the **pejorative** or **ameliorative** development of meaning.
  5. Causes, nature and result of semantic changes should be regarded as three essentially different but closely connected aspects of the same linguistic phenomenon.

# References:

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