

Intralinguistic Relations of Words

Types of Semantic Relations

Lecture 6

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I. Intralinguistic Relations of Words

Ferdinand de Saussure:

- Intralinguistic relations exist between words
- They are basically of two types: syntagmatic and paradigmatic

1.1. Syntagmatic Relations -

are the relationships that a linguistic unit has with other units in the stretch of speech in which it occurs.

1. *He got a letter* (to receive);
2. *He got tired* (to become);
3. *He got to London* (to arrive);
4. *He could not get the piano through the door* (to move smth. to or from a position or place).

syntagmatic relations are linear relations between words

- The adjective *yellow*:
 1. colour: *a yellow dress*;
 2. envious, suspicious: *a yellow look*;
 3. corrupt: *the yellow press*

Context - the minimal stretch of speech determining each individual meaning of the word.

- **free** or **denominative meanings** - the meaning or meanings representative of the semantic structure of the word and least dependent on context:

table – a piece of furniture;

make - construct, produce'

1.2. PARADIGMATIC RELATIONS -

are the relations that a linguistic unit has with units by which it may be replaced: sets of synonyms, pairs of antonyms, lexico-semantic groups, etc.

E.G. *to get* synonymic set: *to obtain, to receive, to gain, to acquire*, etc.

The distinction between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations is conventionally indicated by *horizontal* and *vertical* presentation.

Syntagmatic relations

Paradigmatic relations

He	got	a	letter.
I	received	a	note
She	obtained	an	epistle. etc.

II. SEMANTIC SIMILARITY

- Lexical units may also be classified by the criterion of semantic similarity and semantic contrasts. The terms generally used to denote these two types of semantic relatedness are synonymy and antonymy.

- 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 **al'beit**, **on** and **upon**, **since** and **as** are synonymous because these phonemically different words are similar in their denotational meaning.

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- **Synonyms** are traditionally described as words different in sound-form but identical or similar in meaning.
 - This definition has been severely criticised on many points.

Firstly,

- it seems impossible to speak of identical or similar meaning of words as 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**, 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.

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- 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 the denotational component that may be described as identical or similar. If we analyse words that are usually considered synonymous, e.g. **to die, to pass away; to begin, to commence**, etc.,

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- The connotational component or the stylistic reference of these words is entirely different and it is only the similarity of the denotational meaning that makes them synonymous.

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- 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 **identity of meaning** as a criterion of synonymy since identity of meaning is very rare even among monosemantic words.
- Cases of complete synonymy are very few and are 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.

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- Differentiation of synonyms may be observed in different semantic components — **denotational** or **connotational**.

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- The difference in **denotational meaning** cannot exceed certain limits, and is always combined with some common denotational component.

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- 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**).

- 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*).

- The relationship of synonymy implies certain differences in the denotational meaning of 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.

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- 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.

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- That department of an institution which is concerned with acquisition of materials is normally the **Purchasing Department** rather than the ***Buying Department**.
 - A wife however would rarely ask her husband **to purchase** a pound of butter. It follows that practically no words are substitutable for one another in all contexts.

- This fact may be explained as follows: firstly, words synonymous in some lexical contexts may display no synonymy in others.
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- The comparison of the sentences *The rainfall in April was abnormal* and *The rainfall in April was exceptional* may give us grounds for assuming that *exceptional* and *abnormal* are synonymous.
 - The same adjectives in a different context are by no means synonymous, as we may see by comparing *My son is exceptional* and *My son is abnormal*.

- **Secondly**, interchangeability alone cannot serve as a criterion of synonymy.
- Synonyms are words interchangeable in some contexts. But the reverse is certainly not true as semantically different words of the same part of speech are, as a rule, interchangeable in quite a number of contexts: in the sentence

I saw a little girl playing in the garden

the adjective *little* may be formally replaced by a number of semantically different adjectives, e.g. *pretty, tall, English*, etc.

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- **Thus** a more acceptable definition of synonyms :
 - synonyms are words different in their sound-form, but similar in their denotational meaning or meanings and interchangeable at least in some contexts.



III. SEMANTIC CONTRAST

- **Antonymy** in general shares many features typical of synonymy.
- Perfect or complete antonyms are fairly rare.
- The relations of antonymy restricted to certain contexts. Thus *thick* is only one of the antonyms of *thin* (*a thin slice—a thick slice*), another is *fat* (*a thin man—a fat man*).

- The term **opposite meaning** is rather vague and allows of essentially different interpretation.
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- **kind** — ‘gentle, friendly, showing love, sympathy or thought for others’ and **cruel** — ‘taking pleasure in giving pain to others, without mercy’,
 - They denote concepts that are felt as completely opposed to each other.

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- Comparing the adjective *kind* and *unkind* we do not find any polarity of meaning as here semantic opposition is confined to simple negation.
 - *Unkind* may be interpreted as *not kind* which does not necessarily mean *cruel*, just as *not beautiful* does not necessarily mean *ugly*.

II. BASIC TYPES OF SEMANTIC RELATIONS

2.1. PROXIMITY

Meaning similarity is seldom complete and nearly always partial which makes it possible to speak about the semantic proximity of words and, in general, about the relations of semantic proximity.

The adjectives are characterized by certain features of semantic dissimilarity which shows that they are not absolutely identical in meaning

Beautiful	Extremely <u>good-looking</u> , much more than most women
Pretty	<u>Good-looking</u> in an ordinary way but not really beautiful or sexually exciting
Attractive	<u>Good-looking</u> , especially in a way that makes you feel sexually interested
Striking	<u>Very attractive</u> , especially because a woman has a particular feature, such as hair or eyes, that is beautiful and unusual
Handsome	<u>Good-looking</u> in an unusual way, especially because a woman is tall or strong or looks as if she has a strong character

Semantic Proximity

1. *red* and *green* share the semantic features of 'colour', 'basic or rainbow colour', 'complementary colour,;
2. *red* vs *scarlet* or *green* vs *emerald* may be graded in semantic proximity;
3. *table* and *chair* share the semantic features of 'thingness', 'object', 'piece of furniture' that forms a good basis for grouping them together with other nouns denoting 'pieces of furniture'.

2.2. Equivalence

- implies full similarity of meaning of two or more language units;
- is very seldom observed in words;
- Is oftener encountered in case of sentences:

John is taller than Bill = Bill is shorter than John.

She lives in Paris = She lives in the capital of France.

2.3. INCLUSION. HYPONYMIC STRUCTURE -

type of semantic relations which exists between two words if the meaning of one word contains the semantic features 'constituting the meaning of the other word'.

The semantic relations of inclusion are called **hyponymic relations**:

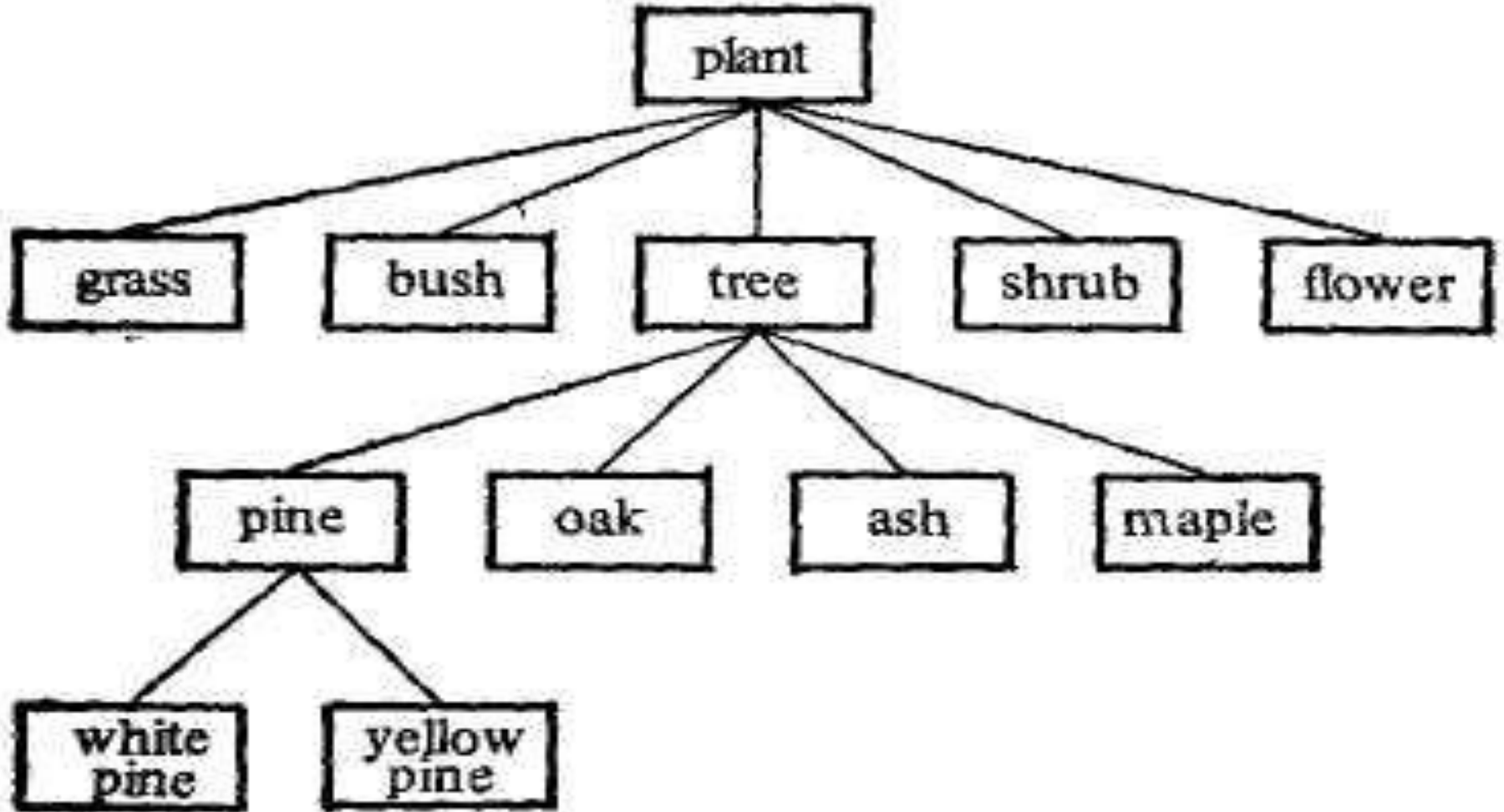
Vehicle: *car, lorry, motorcycle, jeep...*

Hyperonym: hyponyms.

- The general term – *vehicle, tree, animal* – is referred to as the classifier or the **hyperonym**.

- The specific term is called the **hyponym** (*car, tram; oak, ash; cat; tiger*).
- The more specific term (the hyponym) is included in the more general term (the hyperonym), e.g. the classifier *move* and members of the group – *walk, run, saunter*. The individual terms contain the meaning of the general term in addition to their individual meanings which distinguish them from each other.

In hyponymic structure certain words may be both classifiers (hyperonyms) and members of the group (hyponyms):



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- The principle of such hierarchical classification is widely used by scientists in various fields of research: botany, geology, etc.
 - Hyponymic classification may be viewed as objectively reflecting the structure of vocabulary and is considered by many linguists as one of the most important principles for the description of meaning.

Persons

- 1. adults** (man, woman, husband, etc.);
- 2. children** (boy, girl, lad, etc.) but also
- 3. national groups** (American, Russian, Chinese, etc.),
- 4. professional groups** (teacher, butcher, baker, etc.),
- 5. social and economic groups,** and so on.

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- The problem of great importance for linguists is the dependence of the hierarchical structures of lexical units not only on the structure of the corresponding group of referents in real world but also on the structure of vocabulary in this or that language.

In English
LSV
meals:

- **breakfast,**
- **lunch,**
- **dinner,**
- **supper,**
- **snack etc,**

in Russian
no word for
meals

- **завтрак**
- **обед**
- **ПОЛДНИК**
- **ужин**

2.4. OPPOSITION -

is the contrast of semantic features which helps to establish the semantic relations (*black* is contrasted to *white*).

The relations of opposition imply the exclusion of the meaning of one word by another (*black* is opposed to *white* but it is not opposed to either *red* or *yellow*. In the latter case we can speak about contrast of meaning, but not the semantic relations of opposition.

Polar oppositions

- are those which are based on the semantic feature uniting two linguistic units by antonymous relations,
- *rich – poor,*
- *dead – alive,*
- *young – old.*

2. Relative oppositions

imply that there are several semantic features on which the opposition rests. The verb *to leave* means 'to go away from' and its opposite, the verb *to arrive* denotes 'to reach a place, esp. at the end of a journey'.

Summary and Conclusions:

- 1. Paradigmatic (or selectional) and syntagmatic (or combinatory) axes of linguistic structure represent the way vocabulary is organised.
- Syntagmatic relations define the word-meaning in the flow of speech in various contexts.
- Paradigmatic relations define the word-meaning through its interrelation with other members within one of the subgroups of vocabulary units.

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- 2.** On the syntagmatic axis the word-meaning is dependent on different types of contexts. Linguistic context is the minimal stretch of speech necessary to determine individual meanings.

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- 3)** Linguistic (verbal) contexts comprise lexical and grammatical contexts and are opposed to extra-linguistic (non-verbal) contexts. In extra-linguistic contexts the meaning of the word is determined not only by linguistic factors but also by the actual speech situation in which the word is used.

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4. The semantic structure of polysemantic words is not homogeneous as far as the status of individual meanings is concerned. A certain meaning (or meanings) is representative of the word taken in isolation, others are perceived only in various contexts.

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- 5.** Synonymy and antonymy are correlative and sometimes overlapping notions (частично совпадающие). Synonymous relationship of the denotational meaning is in many cases combined with the difference in the connotational (mainly stylistic) component.

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6. It is suggested that the term synonyms should be used to describe words different in sound-form but similar in their denotational meaning (or meanings) and interchangeable at least in some contexts.

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7. The term antonyms is to be applied to words different in sound-form characterised by different types of semantic contrast of the denotational meaning and interchangeable at least in some contexts

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