# Semantic Classification of Words

Lecture 7

# SEMANTIC CLASSIFICATION OF WORDS

1. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF GROUPING WORDS.
2. SYNONYMY
    1. SYNONYMS
    2. CLASSIFICATION OF SYNONYMS
    3. EUPHEMISMS
3. ANTONYMY
    1. ANTONYMS
    2. CLASSIFICATION OF ANTONYMS
4. TERMINOLOGICAL AND LEXICO-SEMANTIC GROUPS OF WORDS
    1. LEXICAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL SETS
    2. LEXICO-SEMANTIC GROUPS
    3. SEMANTIC FIELDS

# I. BASIC PRINCIPLES OF GROUPING WORDS

○ <u>Two basic principles of grouping words</u>:

1. to classify words proceeding from the basic types of semantic relations;
2. to group words together starting off with associations connecting the given words with other vocabulary units.

## SEMANTIC CLASSES (CATEGORIES):

1. Synonyms;
2. Antonyms;
3. Lexical & terminological sets;
4. Lexico-semantic groups;
5. Semantic fields;

# II. SYNONYMY

- **Synonymy –** the kind of semantic relations that implies the coincidence in the essential meanings of linguistic elements, which usually preserve their differences in connotations and stylistic characteristics.
- Synonymy does not present a perfect type of a linguistic category.

# 2.1. SYNONYMS

- **Synonyms** - words belonging to one part of speech, close in meaning and interchangeable at least in some contexts.
- **Characteristics**: the semantic relations of equivalence or by semantic relations of proximity.
- Types of synonyms:

  **Full (total) synonyms** characterized by semantic equivalence, are extremely rare.

# The degree of semantic proximity

is estimated in terms of aspect of meaning:

1. the denotational;
2. the connotational;
3. the pragmatic.

1. **The difference in connotation**: *famous* - 'known widely, having fame' and *notorious* 'widely known because of smth bad, e.g. for being criminal, violent, immoral'. Thus, *famous* has a positive emotive evaluation, and the word *notorious* – negative.

2. **The difference in the pragmatic value**: cf.: *brotherly – fraternal* (братский), *bodily – corporal* (телесный). In a few cases these synonymic values are reversed, e.g. *deed – action (*подвиг - поступок), *foe – enemy* (противник – враг).

# 2.2.CLASSIFICATION OF SYNONYMS

1. **<u>Stylistic synonymy</u>** implies no interchangeability in context because the underlying situations are different, e.g. *children – infants, dad – father*.

2. **<u>Ideographic synonymy</u>** presents a still lower degree of semantic proximity and is observed when the connotational and pragmatic aspects are similar, but there are certain differences in the denotational aspect of meaning of two words, e.g. *forest – wood, apartment – flat, shape – form*.

3.  **<u>Ideographic-stylistic synonymy</u>** is characterized by the lowest degree of semantic proximity. e.g. *ask – inquire, expect – anticipate.*

# SYNONYMIC DOMINANT -

a dominant element, which is the most general term potentially containing the specific features rendered by all the other members of the synonymic group. In the series *leave – depart – quit – retire – clear out* the verb *leave* is a synonymic dominant.

## 2.3. EUPHEMISM -

is substitution of words of mild or vague connotations for expressions rough, unpleasant.

The word ***to die*** has the following euphemisms: *to expire, to pass away, to depart, to join the majority, to kick the bucket*, etc; ***pregnant** – in the family way*.

# III. ANTONYMY
## 3.1. ANTONYMS

**Antonyms** – a class of words grouped together on the basis of the semantic relations of opposition.

## 3.2. CLASSIFICATION OF ANTONYMS

**Structurally**, antonyms can be divided into antonyms of the same root, e.g. *to do – to undo; cheerful – cheerless*; and antonyms of different roots, e.g. *day – night, rich – poor*.

# SEMANTICALLY
## ANTONYMS ARE CLASSIFIED INTO

1. **Contradictories** represent the type of semantic relations that exist between pairs like, e.g. *dead – alive, single – married.*

1. **Contraries** (gradable antonyms) are antonyms that can be arranged into a series according to the increasing difference in one of their qualities: in *cold – hot* , *cool – warm* are intermediate members.

3. **<u>Incompatibles</u>** - antonyms which are characterized by the relations of exclusion: *morning - afternoon*, *evening - night*.

# INTERCHANGEABILITY OF ANTOMYMS

○ Polysemy may be analysed through synonymy: *handsome* can be singled out by means of synonymic substitution a *handsome man—a beautiful man;* but a *handsome reward—a generous reward*.

○ Polysemy may be also analysed through antonymy:

*a handsome man—an ugly man, a handsome reward—an insufficient* etc.).

# 4.1. LEXICAL AND TERMINOLOGICAL SETS

**Lexical sets** are words denoting things correlated on extralinguistic groups form: *lion, tiger, leopard, puma, cat* refer to the lexical set of 'the animal of the cat family'.

**Terminological sets** are lexical sets, which acquire a more specialized character:

e.g. names of 'musical instruments': *piano, organ, violin, drum;*

names of 'parts of the car mechanism': *radiator, motor, handbrake, wheels*.

# 4.2. LEXICO-SEMANTIC GROUPS

**Lexico-semantic group** unites words describing sides of one and the same general notion if:

1. the underlying notion is not too generalized and all-embracing, like notions of 'time', 'space', 'life', 'process', etc.

2. the reference to the underlying notion is not just an implication in the meaning of the lexical unit but forms an essential part in its semantics.

Verbs of 'destruction': *to ruin, to destroy, to explore, to kill*, etc.

# Lexico-semantic groups of words

- The word *saleswoman* may be analysed into the semantic components 'human', 'female', 'professional'. Consequently the word *saleswoman* may be included into a lexico-semantic group under the heading of **human** together with the words man, woman, boy, girl, etc. and under the heading **female** with the *words* girl, wife, woman and also together with the words teacher, pilot, butcher, etc., as professionals.

**Different meanings of polysemantic words make it possible to refer the same word to different lexico-semantic groups:**

---

- *Make* in the meaning of 'construct' is naturally a member of the same lexico-semantic group as the verbs produce, manufacture, etc , whereas in the meaning of 'compel' it is regarded as a member of a different lexico-semantic group made up by the verbs force, induce, etc.

# The verb 'take'

- in combination with any member of the lexical group denoting means of transportation is synonymous with the verb go (take the tram, the bus, etc.).

- When combined with members of another lexical group the same verb is synonymous with to drink (to take tea, coffee, etc.).

# 4.3. SEMANTIC FIELDS

- **A semantic field -** is a large group of words of different parts of speech in which the underlying notion is broad enough to include almost all-embracing sections of vocabulary. The main feature of a semantic field is its **national specifics**.

- E.g., *cosmonaut* (n), *spacious* (adj*.), to orbit* (v) belong to the semantic field of 'space'.

# Semantic Fields:

1. of colours: *blue, red, yellow, black,* etc.

2. of kinship terms: *mother, father, brother, cousin,* etc.

3. of pleasurable emotions: *joy, happiness, gaiety, enjoyment*, etc.

# The word 'captain'

- cannot be properly understood until we know the semantic field in which this *term* operates — the army, the navy, or the merchant service. Thus, **captain** is determined by the place it occupies among the terms of the relevant rank system. What **captain** means we know whether his subordinate is called mate or first officer (merchant service), commander ('navy') or lieutenant ('army').

# **Kinship terms** in Russian and in English

○ the meaning of the English term **mother-in-law** is different from either the Russian *тёща* or *свекровь* as the English term covers the whole area which in Russian is divided between the two words. The same is true of the members of the semantic field of colours (cf. **blue** — *синий, голубой*), of human body (cf. **hand, arm** — *рука*) and others.
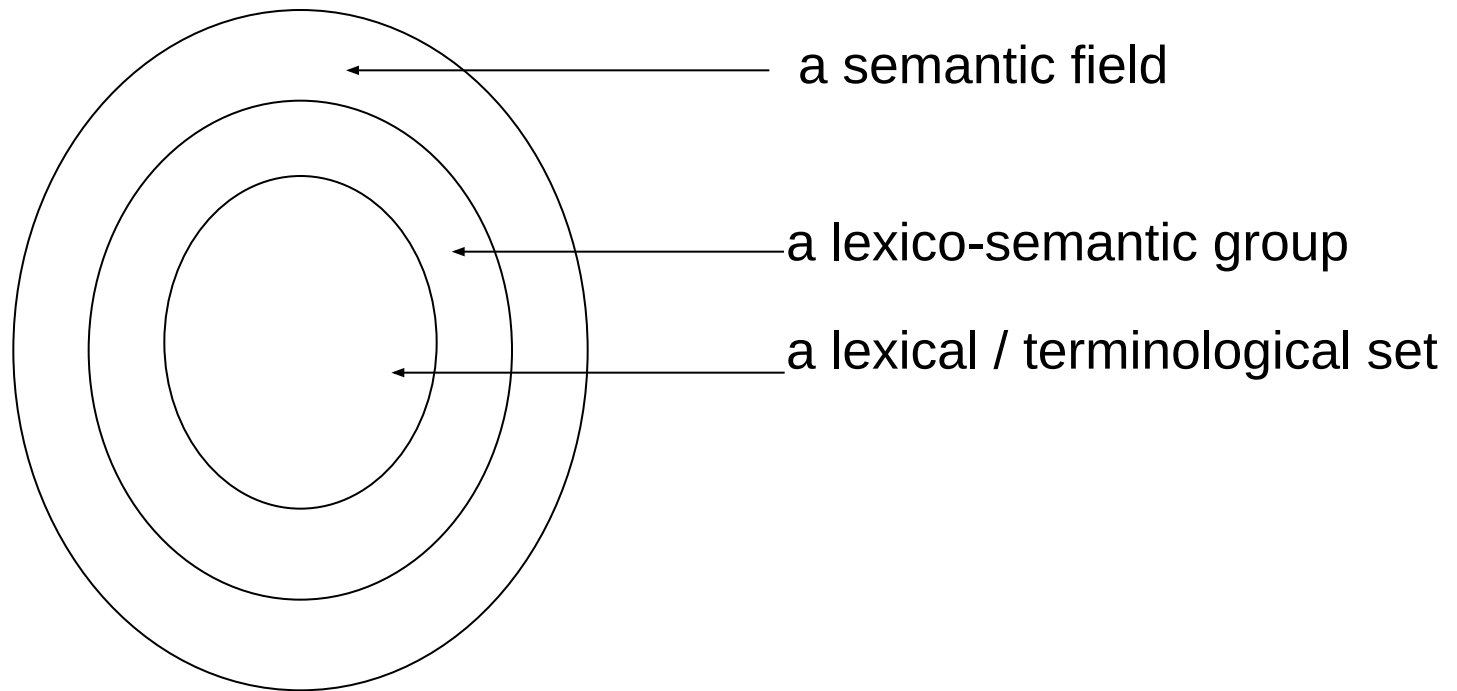
# Semantic field of 'space':

1. nouns: expanse, extent, surface, etc.;
2. verbs: extend, spread, span, etc.;
3. Adjectives: spacious, roomy, vast, broad, etc.

# The correlation between the semantic classes may be graphically presented by means of concentric circles (diagram).

a semantic field

a lexico-semantic group

a lexical / terminological set

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Classification of vocabulary into thematic groups is based on common contextual associations. Contextual associations are formed as a result of regular co-occurrence of words in similar, repeatedly used contexts within the framework of sentences.

2. The main criterion underlying semantic classification of vocabulary items on the paradigmatic axis is the type of meaning relationship between words.

3. The criterion of common concept serves to classify words into semantic fields and lexico-semantic groups.

4. Semantic relationship of inclusion is the main feature of hyponymic hierarchical structure Semantic similarity and semantic contrast is the type of relationship which underlies the classification of lexical items into synonymic and antonymic series.

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

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.

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.

# References:

1. Гинзбург Р.З. Лексикология английского языка. М. Высшая школа, 1979. – С.- 51-59.
2. Зыкова И.В. Практический курс английской лексикологии. М.: Академия, 2006. – С. – 43-46.
3. Babich G.N. Lexicology: a current guide. Екатеринбург: Уральское издательство, 2006. – С. 79-86.
4. Антрушина Г.Б., Афанасьева О.В., Морозова Н.Н. Лексикология английского языка. М.: Дрофа, 2006. – С. 209-219.