

1. Semantic change.

Types of semantic changes;

2. The semantic structure of the word;

3. Polysemy;

4. Meaning and context;



Semantic change

– changes of both synchronic and diachronic nature, which concerns the semantic content of the word. New meanings would appear by means of semantic shift (q.v.) and semantic transference (q.v.), which lead to the growth of polysemy. Causes for s.ch. can be both extralinguistic and linguistic.



Causes of semantic change:

1) **Historical causes.**

Ex.: “car” which goes back to Latin “carfus” which meant a four wheeled (vehicle) wagon, despite of the lack of resemblance.

2) **Psychological causes.**

Ex.: “lady’s room” instead of the “lavatory”

3) **Linguistic causes**

Tendency of a language to borrow a particular metaphorical development of a word from another language.



TYPES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE

1. Widening/Extension

=> range of meanings of a word increases so that the word can be used in more contexts than were appropriate before the change

-**dog** => 1) specific powerful breed of dog => all breeds or races of dog

-**cupboard** => 1) table upon which cups or vessels were placed, a piece of furniture to display plates => closet or cabin with shelves for the keeping cups and dishes => AE: small storage cabinet

2. Narrowing (specialisation, restriction)

=> range of meaning is decreased so that a word can be used appropriately only in fewer contexts than before the change

***meat** => 'food' in general ;

***hound** => OE *hund* 'dog in general' => species of dog (long eared hunting dog) ;

***wife** => OE 'woman' => 'woman of humble rank or low employment'
=> 'married woman, spouse'

***girl** => ME 'child or young person of either sex' => 'female child, young woman'



3. Metaphor

-involves relationship of perceived similarity

***root** (of plant) => > root of plant, root of word, root in algebra, source

***stud** => 'good-looking sexy man' (of slang origin) derived from *stud* 'a male animal used for breeding'

***chill** => 'relax, calm down' of slang origin, original 'to cool'

4. Metonymy

-inclusion of additional senses which were originally not present but which are closely associated with word's original meaning

-**tea** => 'drink' => 'evening meal accompanied by drinking tea';

cheek 'fleshy side of the face below the eye' < OE: *cēace* 'jaw, jawbone'

5. Synecdoche

-kind of metonymy, involves part-to-whole relationship

-**hand** 'hired hand, employed worker';

tongue 'language'



6. Degeneration / Pejoration

-sense of a word takes on a less positive, more negative evaluation in the minds of the users

- **knave** 'a rogue' < OE: *cnafa* 'a youth, a child' > 'servant' ;

-**spinster** 'unmarried woman' < 'one who spins' ;

-**silly** 'foolish, stupid' < ME *sely* 'happy, innocent' < OE *sælig* "blessed, blissful"

-**disease** 'illness' < 'discomfort' (cf. *dis+ease*)

7. Elevation /Amelioration

-shifts in the sense of a word in the direction towards a more positive value in the minds of the users

-**pretty** < OE: *prættig* 'crafty, sly'

-**knight** 'mounted warrior serving a king' 'lesser nobility' < OE *cniht* 'boy, servant' > 'servant' > 'military servant';

dude 'guy, person' < in 1883 a word of ridicule for 'man who affects an exaggerated fastidiousness in dress, speech and deportment', a dandy'



8. Taboo replacement and avoidance of obscenity

- ass** 'long-eared animal related to a horse' => *donkey*;
- cock** 'adult male chicken' => *rooster*,
- bloody** nose => *blood nose/bleeding nose*
- toilet** : *WC, bathroom, lavatory, restroom, loo, john*

9. Hyperbole

- shift in meaning due to exaggeration by overstatement
- terribly, horribly, awfully** 'very'

10. Litotes

- exaggeration by understatement



Polysemy

- The ability of words to have more than one meaning is described as **polysemy**
- A word having several meanings is called **polysemantic**
- Words having only one meaning are called **monosemantic** (terms, nouns, plurals)



Polysemy

- polysemy is more characteristic of the English vocabulary as compared with Russian
- monosyllabic character of English, predominance of root words – reasons for widespread development of polysemy



Polysemy

- the greater the frequency of a word the more polysemantic it is
- the commoner the word the more meanings it has
- each of the individual meanings may have its own types of meanings: connotational, part-of-speech, etc.



Diachronic Approach to Polysemy

- growth and development in the semantic structure of the word
- the word retains its previous meaning(s) and at the same time acquires (a) new one(s)
- some of the old meanings may become obsolete or disappear



Diachronic Approach to Polysemy

- ME a table
OE tabule } **primary meaning**
“a flat slab of stone or wood”
- a table – 1) people seated
at a table for a meal;
2) food provided at a table } **secondary,
derived
meaning**



Diachronic Approach to Polysemy

- **primary meaning** – the first meaning with which the word appeared in the language
- **secondary meaning** – could appear only after the primary meaning
- **derived meaning** – could not have appeared before primary meaning was in existence and is dependent on it



Synchronic Approach to Polysemy

- coexistence of various meanings at the same historical period of the development of the language



Synchronic Approach to Polysemy

- a table - “*a piece of furniture*” – **basic/central meaning**
- a table - *1) people seated at a table for a meal;*
2) food provided at a table } **minor/
marginal
meanings**



Synchronic Approach to Polysemy

- **basic/ central meaning** – the meaning that first occurs to us whenever we see or hear a word, occurs in different contexts, has the highest frequency
- **minor/ marginal meaning** – less frequent, observed only in certain contexts



Synchronic and Diachronic Approaches to Polysemy

revolution

- Middle English – 1) “*the revolving motion of celestial bodies*” - **primary meaning and central meaning** 2) “*a complete overthrow of the established government*” – **secondary and minor meaning**
- Modern English – 1) “*a complete overthrow of the established government*” - **secondary and central meaning**



Semantic Structure of Words

Lexico-semantic variant (LSV)

1. polysemantic word in one of its meanings;
2. represents unity of form and meaning;
3. has its own morphological peculiarities, syntactic function, different valency
4. contain a semantic component which may be found in all other LSV of this word



Semantic Structure of Words

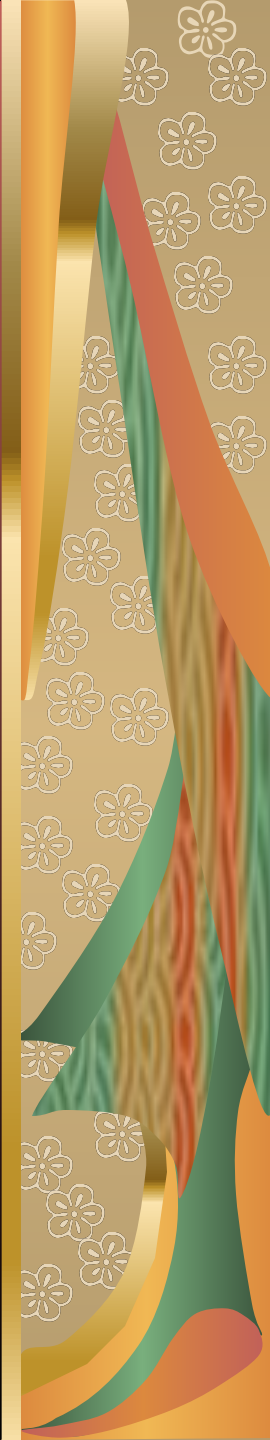
- **semantic structure of a word** – a structured set of interrelated lexico-semantic variants
- **semantic structure of a word** – combination of various meanings



Semantic Structure of Words

e.g. semantic structure of the word **Table**

1. *a piece of furniture*
2. *people seated at a table for a meal*
3. *sing. food provided at a table*
4. *a thin flat piece of metal, wood, etc.*
5. *pl. slabs of stone*
6. *pl. words cut into them or written on them (ten tables)*
7. *an orderly arrangement of facts, figures, etc.*
8. *part of machine-tool on which the work is put to be operated on*



Types of Lexical Meanings as Elements of a Word's Semantic Structure

primary : : secondary

basic : : minor

central : : peripheric

direct : : figurative

general : : particular

abstract : : concrete

neutral : : coloured

present day : : archaic



Polysemy and Context

- the meaning of a word in speech is **contextual** – depends on the context
- meaning is determined by the **context**



Polysemy and Context

- **context** – the minimal stretch of speech determining each individual meaning of the word
- **context** individualizes the meanings, brings them out



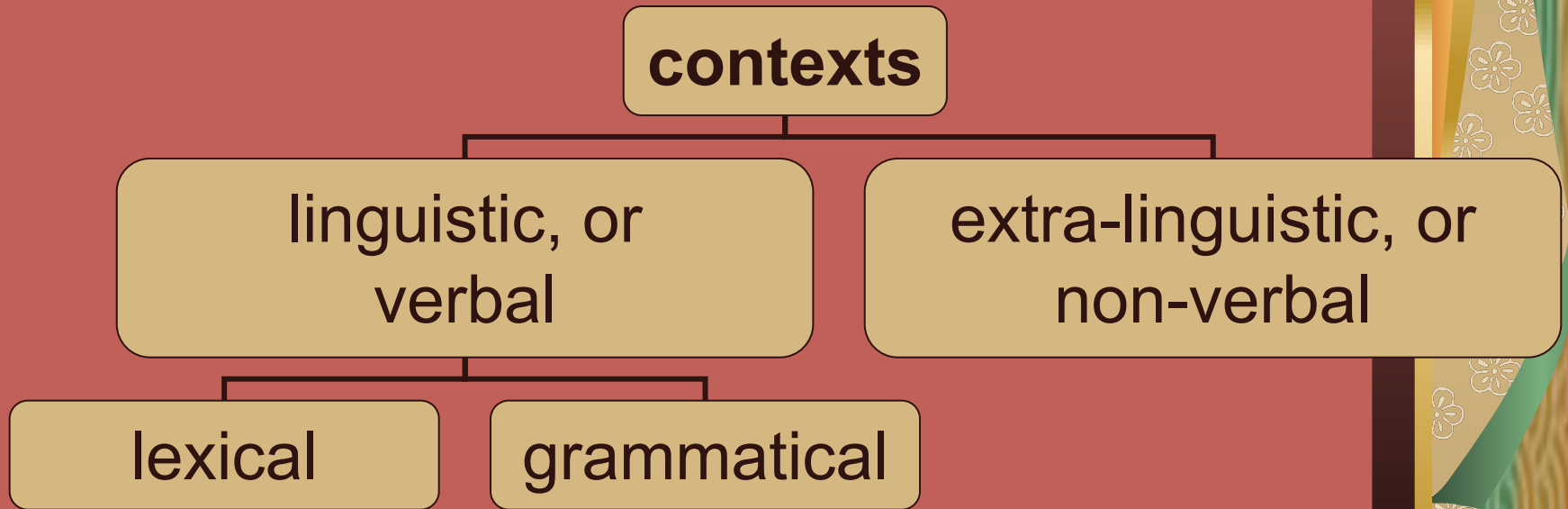
Polysemy and Context

- meaning(s) of the word that are least dependant on the context are **free** or **denominative** meanings

e.g. table - “a piece of furniture”



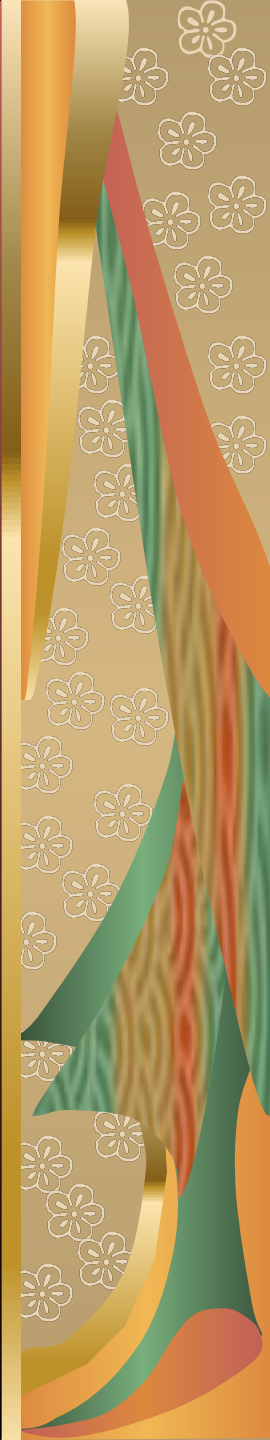
Types of Contexts



Types of Contexts

- **extra-linguistic context** – a real speech situation in which the word is used

*e.g. “I’ve got it” – 1) possess
2) understand*



Types of Contexts

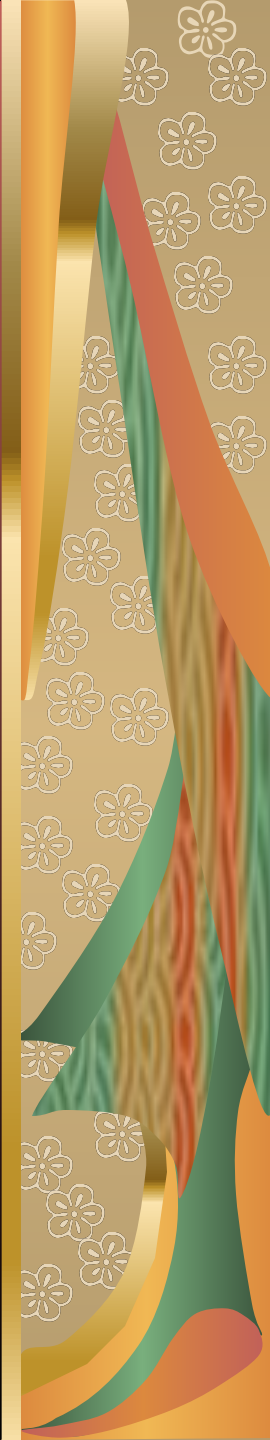
grammatical context – where grammatical structure of the context serves to determine various individual meanings of a polysemantic word



Grammatical Context

e.g. to make – 1) “to force, to induce” – ***make somebody do something*** – “make + smbd + bare infinitive”

2) “to become, to turn out to be” – ***make a good wife*** – make + adjective + noun



Lexical context

- **lexical context** – the group of words which fill the grammatical pattern which forms the environment of the analyzed word



Lexical Context

e.g. **heavy** - "of great weight, weighty" –
heavy load, heavy table

heavy + natural phenomenon =
"striking, falling with force" – **heavy**
rain, heavy wind

heavy + industry, arms, artillery = "the
larger kind of something" – **heavy**
industry, heavy artillery

