Elena SAPA
dr., conf.univ.,
Universitatea de Stat din Moldova

ENGLISH SYNONYMS TYPOLOGY AND SOURCES

Taxonomia sinonimelor în limba engleză, trăsăturile specifice și sursele acestora sunt extrem de importante pentru interpretarea corecta a sensurilor sinonimelor folosite în texte de diferite genuri literare și non-literare. Exemplele propuse permit a depista sinonimul dominant din șirul de sinonime utilizate în text cu elucidarea sensurilor stilistice și contextuale.

Cuvinte cheie: echivalența semantică, sinonimul dominant, sensuri stilistice conotative.

Lexical units in the English language may be classified, by the criterion of semantic similarity and semantic contrast. Synonymy is the coincidence in the essential meaning of words which usually preserve their differences in connotations and stylistic characteristics. Synonyms are two or more words belonging to the same part of speech and possessing one or more identical or nearly identical denotational meanings, interchangeable in some contexts.

The word *synonym* comes from Ancient Greek syn (σύν) ("with») and onoma (ὄνομα) ("name»).

Synonyms can be any part of speech (such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs or prepositions), as long as both words are the same part of speech.

Synonymy is often understood as semantic equivalence. Semantic equivalence however can exist between words and word-groups, word-groups and sentences, sentences and sentences.

Word-group synonyms: *to win a victory = to gain a victory;*

Sentence synonyms: John is taller than Bill = Bill is shorter than John.

Synonymy is confined to semantic relation between words only. 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.

What is denotation a connotation of a word?

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

Ex.: I have always *liked* you very much, I *admire* you talent , but forgive me I could never *love* you as a wife should *love* her husband.

Ex.:-Was she a *pretty* girl?

-I would certainly have called her *attractive*.

Ex.:……Romeo should *smile*, not *grin*

Ex.: A young man was *strolling* along the street and his small companion was demurely *trotting* by his side.

Characteristic Features of a Dominant Synonym

Synonyms are united into synonymous rows. In each row there is one word, which presents a kind of center of the group of synonyms. Its semantic structure is usually simple. This *is the dominant synonym* characterized by the following features:

1. High frequency of usage;
2. Broad combinability;
3. Broad general meaning;
4. Lack of connotations.

Where is the dominant synonym in the examples below?

E.g. in the row: *to look-to stare-to glare-to gaze-to peer-to peep-to glance-to glimpse*-etc.

= the dominant synonym is the word to look.

Criteria of English Synonyms

The following criteria were identified:

1. Conceptional criterion
2. Semantic criterion
3. Criterion of interchangeability (much criticized)

The most famous taxonomy of synonyms was elaborated by V.V. Vinogradov. The basic types were outlined as:

- Ideographic or Relative synonyms
- Stylistic synonyms
- Absolute or Total synonyms

Ideographic synonyms denote different shades of meaning or different degrees of a given quality. They are nearly identical in one or more

denotational meanings and interchangeable at least in some contexts, for example: *beautiful - fine - handsome –pretty-pleasant.* Beautiful conveys, for instance, the strongest meaning; it marks the possession of that quality in its fullest extent, while the other terms denote the possession of it in part only.

Ideographic synonyms may differ in the following connotations:

1. degree or intensity, e.g. to like-to admire –to live – to adore- to worship; to surprise – to astonish- to amaze- to astound;
2. duration, e.g. to glance- to stare ; to say – to talk ;
3. manner, e.g. to stagger – to trot – to pace – to march, etc.;
4. cause, e.g. to shiver –to shudder ; to blush – to redden ;
5. emotive connotation, e.g. alone – lonely;
6. evaluative connotation, e.g. well-known – famous- celebrated-notorious, etc.
7. stylistic elevation or degradation of meaning.

Stylistic synonyms differ not so much in denotational as in emotive value or stylistic sphere of application. They differ in usage and style.

Ex.: *doctor (official), doc (familiar) examination (official), exam (coll.) to commence (official), to begin (coll.)*

In many cases a stylistic synonym has an element of elevation in its meaning, especially when the synonym is an archaic, dialectal or borrowed word, for example: *face - visage, girl - maiden.*

Along with elevation of meaning there is the reverse process of degradation: *to begin - to fire away, to eat - to devour (пожирать) , to steal - to pinch, face – muzzle (морда, рыло).*

Total synonyms are those members of a synonymic group which can replace each other in any given context, without the slightest alteration in denotative meaning or emotional meaning and connotations. Cases of absolute or complete synonymy are very rare. The majority are partial.

Ex.: *fatherland - motherland, noun - substantive, functional affix - flection, inflection, scarlet fever - scarlatina*

Many lexicologists also identify two other types of synonyms: contextual and phraseological synonyms.

Contextual synonyms are similar in meaning only under some specific distributional conditions, Ex.: Go and *buy* some bread – Go and *get* some bread.

Ex.: I cannot *stand* it any longer – I cannot *bear* it any longer.

These words are not synonyms outside the specified contexts.

Phraseological synonyms differ from each other in shades of meaning. We can distinguish between those which are very close in their meanings (for ever – for good (and all) – for keeps; go to bed – go to roost – hit the high – hit the sack) and which differ in meaning considerably.

Among verbs we find phraseological synonyms which differ in the manner of the action expressed by the verb: give somebody a surprise (the synonymic dominant – surprise somebody), make somebody open his eyes (extremely astonish somebody), make somebody sit up (very surprise somebody, wow), take somebody's breath away (unpleasantly surprise somebody).

Synonym Sources

There are several sources of English synonyms:

a) *Borrowings* from French, Latin and Greek are the most numerous, e.g. to question (Fr.) – to interrogate (L) – to ask (native); devoid (Fr.) – vacuous (L) – empty (native); guidance (Fr.) – instruction (L) – teaching (native), etc.

b) *Dialectal words* which come from local dialects and are used in the English vocabulary as regular,
Ex.: girl: lass, lassie; radio:: wireless; long ago:: long syne, etc.

c) *Word-forming process* which is productive in the language at a given time of its history. The words already existing in the language develop new meanings and are formed by affixation, conversion, compounding, shortening and form synonyms to those already in use, e.g. to enter – to come in (phrasal verbs), to verbalize – to word (conversion), popular – pop (shortening).

d) *Euphemisms and vulgarisms* employed for certain stylistic purposes, e.g. in one's birthday suit (naked), in the family way (pregnant) – euphemisms; mug (face), bloody (devilish) – vulgarisms.

e) Synonyms connected with the non-literal *figurative use of words* in pictorial language, e.g. walk of life (occupation, profession), star-gazer (dreamer).

f) Synonyms connected with the *coincidence with idiomatic expressions* (phraseology), e.g. • win /gain the upper hand • decide

/make up one's mind; e.g. naked – in one's birthday suit; to die – to join the silent majority, to kick the bucket, etc.

Synonyms Discrimination

The differences between synonyms may boil down to three areas: *denotation, connotation, and application.*

1. Difference in denotation

a) Difference in the range of meaning •mend: • patch • wind • breeze

b) Difference in the intensity of meaning • rich–wealthy • surprise–astonish • unpleasant–disgusting • anger–fury

2. Difference in connotation

a) Difference in the stylistic colouring • agree–concur • small–diminutive • fire–flame–conflagration • time–age–epoch

b) Difference in the affective colouring • argue–quarrel • modest–humble • brave–foolhardy

3. Difference in application

Collocations: • forbid sb to do sth • prohibit sb from doing sth • charge sb with sth

Synonymy in English is an important feature of language units that requires further studies and systematization.

Bibliography:

1. Ciobanu Olga. A Guide to English Lexicology: Suport de curs la disciplina Lexicologia. Ed. rev – Ch: Cetatea de Sus, 2013- P. 109 – 112.
2. Арнольд И.В. Лексикология современного английского языка: Учеб. для ин-тов и фак. иностр. яз. – 3-е изд., перераб. и доп. – М.: Высш. шк., 1986. – С.194-208