

SYNONYMY AS A LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. The article deals with linguistic phenomenon of synonymy such as linguistic units between which the synonymy relation is established. Different definitions were given by popular authors about synonymy and they were analyzed in a deep way. Examples were also illustrated in order to prove their ideas efficiently. In addition, the members of the synonymic group in a dictionary should have their common denotational meaning. They were clarified with exact pairs which are relevant to synonymy.

Keywords: synonymous pair, theoretical basis, practical function, characteristic feature ,denotational meaning , ideographic synonyms, stylistic characteristics

It is well-known that the traditional approach considers words as units of synonymy between the members of a synonymous pair or group. There is even a more “radical” view of synonyms, restricting them to words of the same part of speech. For example, there are a number of definitions by various authors who consider the word as the synonymy unit. Here are some of them:

“synonyms are words of identical or nearly identical meaning” (French, 2004:146)

“near-synonyms are words which share a salient common core of meaning, but differ in relatively minor respects.”(Aronoff, 2002:9)

“two or more words with very closely related meanings are called synonyms” (Yule, 2006:104)

Such definitions seem to stem from the definition provided by the “inventor” of synonymy, Aristotle in his “Rhetoric”(synonumon “with the same name; *syn*-with, *onuma* –name). As a result, dictionaries of synonyms prepared over the years have used the word as the basis of the synonymy relation. Nevertheless, this sounds justifiable and reasonable given the practical function of the matter. Moreover, dictionaries generally reflect the existing theoretical basis and take it to a practical level for general use. Thus, as the greatest number of studies have focused on the word as the unit of synonymy, it is then expected from dictionary compilers, who may have sometimes been authors of the studies on synonymy themselves, to use the word as the basic unit of a dictionary of synonyms. However, it must be pointed out that there has been a growing tendency to extend the scope of synonymy relations both below and above the word. For example, such a tendency is evident in two monolingual dictionaries in both English and Albanian, where units other than the word have also been included in the definition of synonyms:

“synonym – a word or expression that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another in the same language” (OALD, 2000:1319)

“synonym- a word, expression or construction with identical or very similar meaning with the meaning of another word, expression or construction” (AKSH, 2002:1182) Studying them in terms of interconnection and interdependence may help language users better manage the use of the appropriate word in a given context.

Words that are synonyms are said to be synonymous, and the state of being a synonym is called **synonymy**. The word comes from Ancient Greek *syn* (σύν) ("with") and *onoma* (ὄνομα) ("name"). Synonyms are different words with similar or identical meanings and are interchangeable. An example of synonyms are the words begin, start, and commence. Words can be synonymous when meant in certain senses, even if they are not synonymous in all of their senses. For example, if we talk about a long time or an extended time, long and extended are synonymous within that context.

Thus, *slay* is the synonym of *kill* but it is elevated and more expressive, involving cruelty and violence? The way synonyms function may be seen from the following example: Already in this half-hour of bombardment hundreds upon hundreds of men would have been violently slain, smashed, torn, gouged, crushed, mutilated (Aldington).

For instance: Hope, expectation, anticipation are considered to be synonymous because they all mean "having something in mind which is likely to happen..." But expectation may be either of good or of evil. Anticipation is as a rule an expectation of something good. Hope is not only a belief but a desire that some event would happen. The stylistic difference is also quite marked. The Romance words anticipation and expectation are formal literary words used only by educated speakers, whereas the native monosyllabic *hope* is stylistically neutral. Moreover, they differ in idiomatic usage. Only *hope* is possible in such set expressions as *to hope against hope*, *to lose hope*, *to pin one's hopes on something*. Neither expectation nor anticipation could be substituted into the following quotation from T. Eliot: "You don't know what hope is until you have lost it".

Not a single definition of the term *synonym* provides for any objective criterion of similarity or sameness of meaning as far as it is based on the linguistic intuition of the scholars.

Many scholars defined *synonyms* as words conveying the same notion but differing either in shades of meaning or in stylistic characteristics. In "Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms" its authors used the semantic criterion along with the criterion of interchangeability¹, which we may see from the definition.

A synonym is one of two or more words which have the same or nearly the same essential² (denotational) meaning. It is not a matter of mere likeness in meaning, but a likeness in denotation which may be expressed in its definition. The definition must indicate³ the part of speech and the relations of the ideas involved in a term's meaning.

Synonyms, therefore, are only such words as may be defined wholly⁴ or almost wholly in the same terms. Usually, they are distinguished from one another by an added implication or connotation, or may differ in their idiomatic use or in their implication⁵.

They usually are interchangeable within limits, but interchangeability is not the final test, since idiomatic usage is often a preventive of that. The only satisfactory test of synonyms is their agreement in connotation. The outstanding Russian philologist A.I. Smiritsky suggested the classification of synonyms into 3 types:

1. Ideographic synonyms - words conveying the same notion but differing in shades of meaning: to understand - to realize, to expect - to anticipate
to look - glance - stare - peep - gaze healthy - wholesome - sound - sane
2. Stylistic - words differing only in stylistic characteristics:
to begin - to commence - to high
to think - to deem

¹ взаимозаменяемость

² существенный

³ указывает

enemy - opponent - foe - adversary

to help - to aid - to assist

courage - valour - dauntlessness - grit - guts

3. Absolute (perfect, complete) - words coinciding in all their shades of meaning and in all their stylistic characteristics. Absolute synonyms are rare in a language. In Russian, f.e.: лётчик - пилот – авиатор; языкознание – языковедение; стерня – пожня.

In conclusion, we can say that a characteristic feature of a vocabulary of any language is the existence of synonyms, which is closely connected with the problem of meaning of the word. Indeed, the most complicated problem is the definition of the term "synonyms". There are a great many definitions of the term, but there is no universally accepted one. Traditionally the synonyms are defined as words different in sound-form, but identical or similar in meaning. But this definition has been severely criticized on many points.

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