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Semantic Relations
Among Words: Synonymy

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Abstract

The scientific paper "*Semantic Relations among Words: Synonymy*" focuses on the semantic relation of synonymy while a general presentation of the most important semantic relations among words is also made; thus polysemy, homonymy, antonymy and hyponymy are also briefly presented.

Synonymy is largely detailed beginning with an analysis of stylistic synonyms which means that synonyms often differ stylistically. Then contextual and partial synonyms are also dealt with. Contextual synonymy allows for the possibility that lexically simple expressions may have the same meaning as lexically complex expressions. As far as partial synonyms are concerned, they are taken into consideration starting from the difference which exists between near- synonyms and absolute synonyms. Euphemisms are also addressed since they are a variety of periphrasis, one that is used to replace an unpleasant word or phrase by a conventionally more acceptable one. There is also present a wide range of exercises based on synonymy.

Then stylistic devices based on synonymy- tautology and repetition- are enlarged upon within the present paper as they are extremely interesting, thus showing the richness of a language when it comes to producing new vocabulary.

Introduction

For thousands of years philosophers have been pondering what makes meaning clear, yet speakers of a certain language can understand what is said to them and can produce meaningful strings of words. To understand a language we have to know the meaning of words and morphemes that compose them, we must also know how the meanings of words combine into phrases and sentence meanings and finally, we must interpret the meaning of utterances in the context in which they are made. Learning a language includes learning the agreed-upon meanings of certain strings of sounds and learning how to combine them into larger units that also convey meaning. We are not free to change the meaning of these words at will and the meaning of a word can only be understood and learnt in terms of its relationship with other words in the language.

The purpose of this paper is to thoroughly analyse the important semantic relation among words of synonymy, also making a general presentation of other important semantic relations among words such as homonymy, polysemy, antonymy and hyponymy.

Chapter one presents the general semantic properties that can be shared by words and then a short analysis of the main semantic relation among words is made.

Chapter two analyses in detail the relation of synonymy and the case of stylistic synonyms showing the way in which synonyms can differ stylistically. For instance "*steed*" and "*nag*" have the same conceptual sense but belong to different styles of English: the former is poetic and rather archaic, the latter is

slang. Also taken into consideration within this chapter is the case of contextual synonyms and partial synonyms and then a short presentation of euphemisms- words or phrases used to replace an unpleasant word or phrase by a conventionally more accepted one, for example: the word "*to die*" has bread the following euphemisms: "*to pass away, to expire, to be no more, to depart, to join the majority*"- is made as euphemisms represent a special kind of synonymy.

Chapter three deals with stylistic devices based on synonymy, namely tautology and repetition. A tautology is an unnecessary (and usually unintentional) repetition of meaning, using different words that effectively say the same thing twice. Examples are: *once upon a time, an elephant is an animal, facts are facts etc.* Repetition of lexical units plays an important role in a text and it differs from style to style, having specific functions in individual genres. It is considered to be an effective expressive means of language and it can be of anaphora, epiphora and framing type.

Chapter1
WORD MEANINGS

1.1 Semantic properties

The famous Russian linguist Roman Jakobson pointed out that: "*Language without meaning is meaningless*" and it is well known that for thousands of years philosophers have been pondering the **meaning** of *meaning*. Yet speakers of a language can understand what is said to them and can produce strings of words that are meaningless to other speakers.

To understand language we have to know the meaning of words and morphemes that compose them, we must also know how the meanings of words combine into phrases and sentence meanings and finally, we must interpret the meanings of utterances in the context in which they are made. In other words, knowing a language means knowing how to produce and understand sentences with particular meanings.

The study of the linguistic meaning of morphemes, words, phrases, and sentences is called **semantics**. Subfields of semantics are **lexical semantics**, which is concerned with the meaning of words and the meaning relationships among words; and **phrasal** or **sentential** semantics, which is concerned with the meaning of syntactic units larger than the word. The study of how context affects meaning- for example, how the sentence *It's cold in here* comes to be interpreted as "close the windows" in certain situations-is called **pragmatics**.

Learning a language includes learning the agreed-upon meanings of certain strings of sounds and learning how to combine these meaningful units into larger units that also convey

meaning. We are not free to change the meanings of these words at will, for if we did we would be unable to communicate with anyone. What is for sure is that all the speakers of a language share a basic vocabulary- the sounds and meanings of morphemes and words.

Dictionaries are filled with words and their meanings. So is the head of every human being who speaks a language. We are walking dictionaries and we know the meanings of thousands of words. Our knowledge of their meanings permits us to use them to express our thoughts and to understand them when heard, even though we probably seldom stop and ask ourselves: "What does *boy* mean?" or "What does *walk* mean?" The meaning of words is part of linguistic knowledge and is therefore a part of the grammar. Our mental storehouse of information about words and morphemes is what we have been calling **lexicon**.

Words and morphemes have meanings. We shall talk about the meaning of words, even though words may be composed of several morphemes.

Suppose someone said:

The assassin killed Thwacklehurst.

If the word *assassin* is in our mental dictionary, we know that it was some *person* who murdered some *important person* named Thwacklehurst. Our knowledge of the meaning of *assassin* tells us that it was not an animal that did the killing, and that Thwacklehurst was not a little old man who owned a tobacco shop. Knowledge of *assassin* includes knowing that the individual to whom the word refers is *human,* is a *murderer*, and is a *killer* of *important people*. These pieces of information, then, are some of the **semantic properties** of the word on which