

Module I. Lecture 1

Lexicology as a linguistic discipline. Links with other branches of Linguistics

Plan

1. Definition
2. Links with other branches of Linguistics
3. Two approaches to language study
4. Lexical units

1. Definition

Lexicology is the branch of linguistics that analyzes the lexicon of a specific language. A word is the smallest meaningful unit of a language that can stand on its own, and is made up of small components called morphemes and even smaller elements known as phonemes, or distinguishing sounds. Lexicology examines every feature of a word – including formation, spelling, origin, usage, and definition.

Lexicology also considers the relationships that exist between words. In linguistics, the lexicon of a language is composed of lexemes, which are abstract units of meaning that correspond to a set of related forms of a word. Lexicology looks at how words can be broken down as well as identifies common patterns they follow.

The term «lexicology» is of Greek origin / from «lexis» - «word» and «logos» - «science»/. Lexicology is the part of linguistics which deals with the vocabulary and characteristic features of words and word-groups. The term «vocabulary» is used to denote the system of words and word-groups that the language possesses.

The term «word» denotes the main lexical unit of a language resulting from the association of a group of sounds with a meaning. This unit is used in grammatical functions characteristic of it. It is the smallest unit of a language which can stand alone as a complete utterance. The term «word-group» denotes a group of words which exists in the language as a ready-made unit, has the unity of meaning, the unity of syntactical function, e.g. the word-group «as loose as a goose» means «clumsy» and is used in a sentence as a predicative.

Lexicology can study the development of the vocabulary, the origin of words and word-groups, their semantic relations and the development of their sound form and meaning. In this case it is called historical lexicology. Another branch of lexicology is called descriptive and studies the vocabulary at a definite stage of its development.

Since lexicology studies the meaning of words and their semantic relations, it often explores the history and development of a word. Etymologists analyze related languages using the comparative method, which is a set of techniques that allow linguists to recover the ancestral phonological, morphological, syntactic,

etc., components of modern languages by comparing their cognate material. This means many word roots from different branches of the Indo-European language family can be traced back to single words from the Proto-Indo-European language. The English language, for instance, contains more borrowed words (or loan words) in its vocabulary than native words.

2. Links with other branches of Linguistics

General lexicology is the broad study of words regardless of a language's specific properties. It is concerned with linguistic features that are common among all languages, such as phonemes and morphemes.

Special lexicology, on the other hand, looks at what a particular language contributes to its vocabulary, such as grammars. Altogether lexicological studies can be approached two ways:

1. *Diachronic or historical* lexicology is devoted to the evolution of words and word-formation over time. It investigates the origins of a word and the ways in which its structure, meaning, and usage have since changed.
2. *Synchronic or descriptive* lexicology examines the words of a language within a certain time frame. This could be a period during the language's early stages of development, its current state, or any given interval in between.

These complementary perspectives were proposed by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Lexicology can have both comparative and contrastive methodologies. Comparative lexicology searches for similar features that are shared among two or more languages. Contrastive lexicology identifies the linguistic characteristics which distinguish between related and unrelated languages.

Modern English Lexicology is closely connected with other branches of linguistics, because the word, word-groups and phrases are studied in several branches of linguistics and not in lexicology only.

Lexicology is linked with general linguistics, the history of the language, phonetics, stylistics, grammar and such new branches of our science as sociolinguistics and some others:

Phonetics investigates the phonetic structure of a language which is mainly concerned with the functioning of phonetic units and studies the outer sound-form of the word i.e. its system of phonemes and intonation patterns.

Grammar is the study of the grammatical structure or grammatical system of a language. It is concerned with various meanings of expressing grammatical relations between words as well as with patterns after which words are combined into word-groups and sentences. The ties between lexicology and grammar are particularly strong in the sphere of word-formation which before lexicology became a separate branch of linguistics had even been considered as part of grammar. The characteristic features of English word-building, the morphological structure of the English word are dependent upon the peculiarity of the English grammatical system.

The History of the English language covers the main events in the historical development of the language: the history of its phonetic structure and spelling, the evolution of its grammatical system, the growth of its vocabulary.

Stylistics studies many problems treated in lexicology, which are concerned with the study of nature, functions and structure of stylistic devices, on the one hand, and with the research of each style of language, on the other, i.e. with its aim, its structure, its characteristic features and the effect it produces as well as its interrelation with the other styles of language.

Sociolinguistics investigates the social reasons of the changes in the vocabulary of a language which is directly and immediately reacts to developing and changes in social life. The rapid development of science, industry and technology gives a great number of new words, e.g. *CD/DVD drive* – a small compact disc on which sound or information is recorded. CDs are played on a special machine called *CD player*; *Webcam* – a video camera that is connected to a computer so that what it records can be seen on a website as it happens; *Flat-screen TV* (also *flat-panel*), *Flat-screen computer* – a type of television or computer monitor that is very thin when compared with the traditional type.

3. Two approaches to language study

There are two principal approaches in linguistic science to the study of language material, namely the synchronic and the diachronic approach. With regard to Special lexicology the synchronic approach is concerned with the vocabulary of a language as it exists at a given time, for instance, at the present time. It is special Descriptive Lexicology that deals with the vocabulary and vocabulary units of a particular language at a certain time.

The diachronic approach in terms of Special lexicology deals with the changes and the development of vocabulary in the course of time. It is special Historical lexicology that deals with the evolution of the vocabulary units of a language as time goes by. An English Historical lexicology would be concerned, therefore, with the origin of English vocabulary units, their change and development, the linguistic and extra-linguistic factors modifying their structure, meaning and usage within the history of the English language.

It should be emphatically stressed that the distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic study is merely a difference of approach separating for the purposes of investigation what in real language is inseparable. The two approaches should not be contrasted, or set one against the other; in fact, they are intrinsically interconnected and interdependent: every linguistic structure and system actually exists in a state of constant development so that the synchronic state of a language system is a result of a long process of linguistic evolution, of its historical development.

Thus, Modern English Lexicology investigates two main parts: the treatment of the English word as a structure and the treatment of the English vocabulary as a system. The course of Modern English Lexicology studies the morphological and

semantic patterns according to which the elements of this system are built. It points out the distinctive features with the main semantically relevant partial differences between partially similar elements of the vocabulary which can be systematized and the course tries to explain how these vocabulary patterns are conditioned by the structure of the language.

4. Lexical units

Lexicology studies various lexical units: morphemes, words, variable word-groups and phraseological units. We proceed from the assumption that the word is the basic unit of language system, the largest on the morphologic and the smallest on the syntactic plane of linguistic analysis. The word is a structural and semantic entity within the language system.

It should be pointed out that there is another approach to the concept of the basic language unit. The criticism of this viewpoint cannot be discussed within the framework of the present study. Suffice it to say that here we consistently proceed from the concept of the word as the basic unit in all the branches of Lexicology.

Both words and phraseological units are names for things, namely the names of actions, objects, qualities, etc. Unlike words proper, however, phraseological units are word-groups consisting of two or more words whose combination is integrated as a unit with a specialized meaning of the whole. To illustrate, the lexical or to be more exact the vocabulary units *table*, *wall*, *taxi* are words denoting various objects of the outer world; the vocabulary units *black frost*, *red tape*, *a skeleton in the cupboard* are phraseological units: each is a word-group with a specialized meaning of the whole, namely *black frost* is “frost without snow or rime”, *red tape* denotes bureaucratic methods, *a skeleton in the cupboard* refers to a fact of which a family is ashamed and which it tries to hide.

Questions for discussion

1. Give the definition of the term lexicology
2. What does lexicology study?
3. What other branches of science is lexicology closely related to?
4. What two approaches to language study do you know?
5. What lexical units exist in English? Give examples

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