Module II. Lecture 11

Affixation

<u>Plan</u>
1. Polysemy
2. Synonymy
3. Antonyms

1. Polysemy

The word «polysemy» means «plurality of meanings» it exists only in the language, not in speech. A word which has more than one meaning is called polysemantic. Different meanings of a polysemantic word may come together due to the proximity of notions which they express. E.g. the word «blanket» has the following meanings: a woolen covering used on beds, a covering for keeping a horse warm, a covering of any kind /a blanket of snow/, covering all or most cases /used attributively/, e.g. we can say «a blanket insurance policy».

There are some words in the language which are monosemantic, such as most terms, /synonym, molecule, bronchites/, some pronouns /this, my, both/, numerals. There are two processes of the semantic development of a word: radiation and concatination. In cases of radiation the primary meaning stands in the centre and the secondary meanings proceed out of it like rays.

Each secondary meaning can be traced to the primary meaning. E.g. in the word «face» the primary meaning denotes «the front part of the human head» Connected with the front position the meanings: the front part of a watch, the front part of a building, the front part of a playing card were formed. Connected with the word «face» itself the meanings: expression of the face, outward appearance are formed.

In cases of concatination secondary meanings of a word develop like a chain. In such cases it is difficult to trace some meanings to the primary one. E.g. in the word «crust» the primary meaning «hard outer part of bread» developed a secondary meaning «hard part of anything /a pie, a cake/», then the meaning »harder layer over soft snow» was developed, then «a sullen gloomy person», then «impudence» were developed. Here the last meanings have nothing to do with the primary ones. In such cases homonyms appear in the language. It is called the split of polysemy.

In most cases in the semantic development of a word both ways of semantic development are combined.

2. Synonymy

Synonymy relates to the topic of semantics, which concerns the study of meaning in language. The term synonymy originates from the Greek words *sún* and *onoma,* which mean *with* and *name.* Synonymy in semantics refers to a word with the same (or nearly the same) meaning as another word.

Let's see if you've grasped the concept of synonymy by finding two synonymous words in these sentences:
2.   Today's weather is awful.
3.   Today's weather is terrible.

The first sentence uses *awful* to describe the weather and the second uses *terrible*. Although both sentences use different words, they have the same meaning: *bad*. In other words, awful and terrible are synonyms of bad.
To test whether two words are synonyms (or synonymous), we can use a substitution method: if one word can be replaced by another without changing the meaning/sense of the sentence, the two words are synonyms. The opposite of synonymy is antonymy. Synonymy can be found across all parts of speech: in nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc.

Synonyms are words different in their outer aspects, but identical or similar in their inner aspects. In English there are a lot of synonyms, because there are many borrowings, e.g. hearty / native/ - cordial/ borrowing/. After a word is borrowed it undergoes desynonymization, because absolute synonyms are unnecessary for a language.

However, there are some absolute synonyms in the language, which have exactly the same meaning and belong to the same style, e.g. to moan, to groan; homeland, motherland etc. In cases of desynonymization one of the absolute synonyms can specialize in its meaning and we get semantic synonyms, e.g. «city» /borrowed/, «town» /native/. The French borrowing «city» is specialized. In other cases native words can be specialized in their meanings, e.g. «stool» /native/, «chair»   /French/.

Sometimes one of the absolute synonyms is specialized in its usage and we get stylistic synonyms, e.g. «to begin»/ native/, «to commence» /borrowing/. Here the French word is specialized. In some cases the native word is specialized, e.g. «welkin»   /bookish/,   «sky»   /neutral/. Stylistic synonyms can also appear by means of abbreviation. In most cases the abbreviated form belongs to the colloquial style, and the full form to the neutral style,   e.g.   «examination',   «exam».

Among stylistic synonyms we can point out a special group of words which are called euphemisms. These are words used to substitute some unpleasant or offensive words, e.g «the late» instead of «dead», «to perspire» instead of «to sweat»   etc.

There are also phraseological synonyms, these words are identical in their meanings and styles but different in their combining with other words in the sentence, e.g. «to be late for a lecture» but «to miss the train», «to visit museums» but   «to   attend   lectures»   etc.

In each group of synonyms there is a word with the most general meaning, which can substitute any word in the group, e.g. «piece» is the synonymic dominant in the group «slice», «lump», «morsel». The verb « to look at» is the synonymic dominant in the group «to stare», «to glance», «to peep». The adjective «red' is the synonymic dominant in the group «purple», «scarlet», «crimson».

When speaking about the sources of synonyms, besides desynonymization and abbreviation, we can also mention the formation of phrasal verbs, e.g. «to give up» - «to abandon», «to cut down» - «to diminish».

4. Antonyms

Antonyms are words belonging to the same part of speech, identical in style, expressing contrary or contradictory notions. V.N. Comissarov in his dictionary of antonyms classified them into two groups: absolute or root antonyms /»late» - «early»/ and derivational antonyms «to please' - «to displease». Absolute antonyms have different roots and derivational antonyms have the same roots but different affixes. In most cases negative prefixes form antonyms / un-, dis-, non-/. Sometimes they are formed by means of suffixes -ful and -less.

The number of antonyms with the suffixes ful- and -less is not very large, and sometimes even if we have a word with one of these suffixes its antonym is formed not by substituting -ful by less-, e.g. «successful» -»unsuccessful», «selfless» - «selfish». The same is true about antonyms with negative prefixes, e.g. «to man» is not an antonym of the word «to unman», «to disappoint» is not an antonym of the word «to appoint».

The difference between derivational and root antonyms is not only in their structure, but in semantics as well. Derivational antonyms express contradictory notions, one of them excludes the other, e.g. «active»- «inactive». Absolute antonyms express contrary notions. If some notions can be arranged in a group of more than two members, the most distant members of the group will be absolute antonyms, e.g. «ugly», «plain», «good-looking», «pretty», «beautiful», the antonyms are «ugly» and «beautiful».

Leonard Lipka in the book «Outline of English Lexicology» describes different types of oppositeness, and subdivides them into three types:
a)   complementary,   e.g.   male   -female,   married   -single,
b)   antonyms,   e.g.   good   -bad,
c)   converseness,   e.g.   to   buy   -   to   sell.
In his classification he describes complimentary in the following way: the denial of the one implies the assertion of the other, and vice versa. «John is not married» implies that «John is single». The type of oppositeness is based on yes/no decision. Incompatibility   only   concerns   pairs   of   lexical   units.

Antonymy is the second class of oppositeness. It is distinguished from complimentary by being based on different logical relationships. For pairs of antonyms like good/bad, big/small only the second one of the above mentioned relations of implication holds. The assertion containing one member implies the negation of the other, but not vice versa. «John is good» implies that «John is not bad», but «John is not good» does not imply that «John is bad». The negation of one   term   does   not   necessarily   implies   the   assertion   of   the   other.

An important linguistic difference from complementaries is that antonyms are   always   fully   gradable,   e.g.   hot,   warm,   tepid,   cold. Converseness   is   mirror-image   relations   or   functions,   e.g.   husband/wife,

pupil/teacher, proceed/follow, above/below, before/after etc. «John bought the car from Bill» implies that «Bill sold the car to John». Mirror-image sentences are in many ways similar to the relations between active and passive sentences. Also in the comparative form: »Y is smaller than X, then X is larger than Y».

L. Lipka also gives the type which he calls directional opposition up/down, consequence opposition learn/know, antipodal opposition North/South, East/West, (it is based on contrary motion, in opposite directions.) The pairs come/go, arrive/depart involve motion in different directions. In the case up/down we have movement from a point P. In the case come/go we have movement from or to the speaker.

L. Lipka also points out non-binary contrast or many-member lexical sets. Here he points out serially ordered sets, such as scales / hot, warm, tepid, cool, cold/ ; color words / black, grey, white/ ; ranks /marshal, general, colonel, major, captain etc./ There are gradable examination marks / excellent, good, average, fair, poor/. In such sets of words we can have outer and inner pairs of antonyms. He also points out cycles, such as units of time /spring, summer, autumn, winter/ . In this case there are no «outermost» members.

Not every word in a language can have antonyms. This type of opposition can be met in qualitative adjectives and their derivatives, e.g. beautiful- ugly, to beautify - to uglify, beauty - ugliness. It can be also met in words denoting feelings and states, e.g. respect - scorn, to respect - to scorn, respectful - scornful, to live - to die, alive - dead, life - death. It can be also met among words denoting direction in space and time, e.g. here - there, up - down , now - never, before - after, day - night, early - late etc.

If a word is polysemantic it can have several antonyms, e.g. the word «bright» has the antonyms «dim», «dull», «sad».

Questions for discussion

1. Describe the English polysemantic words
2. What are the synonyms? Give examples
3. What does the term "absolute synonyms" mean?
4. What are the antonyms? Give examples
5. What is the difference between derivational and root antonyms?

References

1. Brandon Specktor, (2022) "The most complicated word in English is only three letters long", Reader's Digest
2. Rodd, Jennifer; Gaskell, Gareth; Marslen-Wilson, William (2002). "Making sense of semantic ambiguity: Semantic competition in lexical access". Journal of Memory and Language. 46 (2): 245–266. doi:10.1006/jmla.2001.2810. ISSN 0749-596X. Retrieved 2023-06-25.

3. *Koskela, Anu (2005).* "On the distinction between metonymy and vertical polysemy in encyclopaedic semantics". Sussex Research Online. Retrieved 30 June 2014.

4. Cruse, D Alan (2000). "Contextual variability". Meaning in Language. Oxford University Press.

5. Klein, D.E., & Murphy, G.L. (2001). The representation of polysemous words. Journal of Memory and Language, 45, 259-282. doi:10.1006/jmla.2001.2779