Module I. Lecture 3

Types of meaning

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1. Grammatical meaning

The word combines in its semantic structure two meanings – lexical and grammatical. Lexical meaning is the individual meaning of the word (e.g. *table*). Grammatical meaning is the meaning of the whole class or a subclass. For example, the class of nouns has the grammatical meaning of thingness. If we take a noun (*table*) we may say that it possesses its individual lexical meaning (it corresponds to a definite piece of furniture) and the grammatical meaning of thingness (this is the meaning of the whole class). Besides, the noun *'table'* has the grammatical meaning of a subclass – countableness. Any verb combines its individual lexical meaning with the grammatical meaning of verbiality – the ability to denote actions or states. An adjective combines its individual lexical meaning with the grammatical meaning of the whole class of adjectives – qualitativeness – the ability to denote qualities. Adverbs possess the grammatical meaning of adverbiality – the ability to denote quality of qualities.

There are some classes of words that are devoid of any lexical meaning and possess the grammatical meaning only. This can be explained by the fact that they have no referents in the objective reality. All function words belong to this group – articles, particles, prepositions, etc.

Types of grammatical meaning

The grammatical meaning may be explicit and implicit. The **implicit** grammatical meaning is not expressed formally (e.g. the word *table* does not contain any hints in its form as to it being inanimate). The **explicit** grammatical meaning is always marked morphologically – it has its marker. In the word *cats* the grammatical meaning of plurality is shown in the form of the noun; *cat's* – here the grammatical meaning of possessiveness is shown by the form *'s*; *is asked* – shows the explicit grammatical meaning of passiveness.

The implicit grammatical meaning may be of two types – general and dependent. The **general** grammatical meaning is the meaning of the whole word-class, of a part of speech (e.g. nouns – the general grammatical meaning of thingness). The **dependent** grammatical meaning is the meaning of a subclass within the same part of speech. For instance, any verb possesses the dependent grammatical meaning of transitivity/intransitivity, terminativeness/non-terminativeness, stativeness/non-stativeness; nouns have the dependent grammatical meaning of contableness/uncountableness and animateness/inanimateness. The most important thing about the dependent

grammatical meaning is that it influences the realization of grammatical categories restricting them to a subclass. Thus the dependent grammatical meaning of countableness/uncountableness influences the realization of the grammatical category of number as the number category is realized only within the subclass of countable nouns, the grammatical meaning of animateness/inanimateness influences the realization of the grammatical category of case, teminativeness/non-terminativeness - the category of tense, transitivity/intransitivity – the category of voice.

The notion of opposition

Any grammatical category must be represented by at least two grammatical forms (e.g. the grammatical category of number – singular and plural forms). The relation between two grammatical forms differing in meaning and external signs is called **opposition** – book::book**s** (unmarked member/marked member). All grammatical categories find their realization through oppositions, e.g. the grammatical category of number is realized through the opposition singular::plural. Taking all the above mentioned into consideration, we may define the grammatical category as the opposition between two mutually exclusive form-classes (a form-class is a set of words with the same explicit grammatical meaning).

Means of realization of grammatical categories may be synthetic (*near – nearer*) and analytic (*beautiful – more beautiful*).

Transposition and neutralization of morphological forms.

In the process of communication grammatical categories may undergo the processes of transposition and neutralization.

Transposition is the use of a linguistic unit in an unusual environment or in the function that is not characteristic of it (*He is a lion*). In the sentence *He is coming tomorrow* the paradigmatic meaning of the continuous form is reduced and a new meaning appears – that of a future action. Transposition always results in the neutralization of a paradigmatic meaning. **Neutralization** is the reduction of the opposition to one of its members : custom :: customs – x :: customs; x: spectacles.

2. Lexical meaning

Lexical meaning is the realization of the notion by means of a definite language system. If we compare the word-forms of one and the same word we can observe that besides grammatical meaning they possess another component of word-meaning. Let us compare, for example the following word-forms: **go, goes, went, going, gone.** They all have different grammatical meanings of tense, person and aspect, but each of these forms contains one and the same semantic component denoting the process of movement. This is the lexical meaning of the given verb-forms.

So lexical meaning may be described as the component of word-meaning proper to the word as a linguistic unit and recurrent in all the forms of this word.

By lexical meaning we designate the meaning proper to the given linguistic unit in all its forms and distributions, while by grammatical meaning we designate the meaning proper to sets of word-forms common to all words of a certain class. Both the lexical and grammatical meanings make up the word-meaning as a whole

because neither of them can exist without the other. The lexical meaning of a word is dependent upon its grammatical meaning.

Lexical items or words are generally classified into major word-classes such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs and into minor word-classes such as articles, prepositions, conjunctions and so on. All members of the same word-class share a distinguishing semantic component which can be viewed as the *lexical component of part-of-speech meaning*. The ***grammatical aspect of part-of-speech meaning*** is conveyed as a rule by a set of forms. Here we may speak about the meaning of lexical-grammatical groups or classes of words and, consequently, about ***lexical-grammatical meaning***.

A ***lexical-grammatical class*** may be defined as a class of lexical elements possessing the same lexical-grammatical meaning and a common system of forms in which the grammatical categories inherent in these units are expressed. So every lexical-grammatical group or class is characterized by its own lexical-grammatical meaning forming the common denomenator of all the meanings of the words which belong to this group. The lexical-grammatical meaning may be also regarded as the feature according to which these words are grouped together. As it was mentioned above, the lexical meaning of every word depends upon the part of speech to which this word belongs. In the lexical meaning of every separate word the lexico-grammatical meaning common to all the words of the class to which this word belongs is enriched by additional features and becomes particularized.

Let us take, for example, such words as **bright, clear, good.** These adjectives denote the properties of things capable of being compared and so have degrees of comparison. In the lexical meanings of these words in the forms **brighter, clearer** and **better** the lexical-grammatical meaning of qualitative adjectives common to all the words of this class is enriched the additional meaning of the comparative degree of the quality these words denote.

If we describe the word as a noun we mean to say that it is bound to possess a set of forms expressing the grammatical meanings of number, case, sometimes gender and so on. A verb is understood to possess sets of forms expressing the grammatical meanings of tense, aspect, mood and so on. The part-of-speech meaning of words that possess only one form, for example, prepositions, is observed only in their distribution; compare, for example, **to come *in*** and ***in* the table.**

One of the levels at which grammatical meaning operates is that of minor word class like articles, prepositions and pronouns. One criterion for distinguishing these grammatical items from lexical items is in terms of closed and open sets of units. Grammatical items form closed sets of units usually of small membership, such as articles, prepositions, pronouns. New items are practically never added there. Lexical items proper belong to open sets of units which have indeterminately large membership; new lexical items which are constantly coined to name new objects of reality are added to these open sets of units.

The interrelation of the lexical and grammatical meanings within the word-meaning and the role played by each of them varies in different word-classes and even in different groups of words within one and the same class. In some parts of

speech the prevailing component of the word-meaning is the lexical meaning, in others – the grammatical meaning.

3. Part of speech meaning

It is usual to classify lexical items into major word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) and minor word-classes (articles, prepositions, conjunctions, etc.). All members of a major word-class share a distinguishing semantic component which though very abstract may be viewed as the lexical component of **part-of-speech meaning**. For example, the meaning of 'thingness' or substantiality may be found in all the nouns e.g. **table, love, sugar**, though they possess different grammatical meanings of number, case, etc. It should be noted, however, that the grammatical aspect of the **part-of-speech meanings** is conveyed as a rule by a set of forms. If we describe the word as a noun we mean to say that it is bound to possess a set of forms expressing the grammatical meaning of number (cf. table **- tables),** case (cf. **boy, boy's)** and so on. A verb is understood to possess sets of forms expressing, e.g., tense meaning **(worked—works),** mood meaning **(Work!—(I) work),** etc.

The part-of-speech meaning of the words that possess only one form, e.g. prepositions, some adverbs, etc:, is observed only in their distribution (cf. **to come in (here, there) and in (on, under)** the table).

Open and close sets of words

One of the levels at which grammatical meaning operates is that of minor word classes like articles, pronouns, etc. Members of these word classes are generally listed in dictionaries just as other vocabulary items, that belong to major word-classes of lexical items proper (e.g. nouns, verbs, etc.). One criterion for distinguishing these grammatical items from lexical items is in terms of **closed** and **open** sets. **Grammatical items that form closed sets** of units are usually not so many. New items are practically never added. **Lexical items** that belong to **open sets** are many and new lexical items can be easily added to the sets, which actually fulfill the needs of the speech community to name new things and notions.

The interrelation of the **lexical** and the **grammatical** meaning and the role played by each varies in different word-classes and even in different groups of words within one and the same class. In some parts of speech the prevailing component is the grammatical type of meaning. The lexical meaning of prepositions for example is, as a rule, relatively vague (**independent of somebody, one of the students**). The lexical meaning of some prepositions, however, may be comparatively distinct (cf. **in/on**, **under** the table). In verbs the lexical meaning usually comes to the fore although in some of them, the verb **to be**, e.g., the grammatical meaning of a linking element prevails (cf. he works as a teacher and he is a teacher).

4. Denotational and Connotational meaning

We can further subdivide the lexical meaning into denotational and connotational meanings. As the word's main function is to denote things, concepts

and so on, users of a language cannot have any knowledge or thought of the objects or phenomena of the real world around them unless this knowledge is ultimately embodied in words which have essentially the same meaning for all speakers of that language. This is the **denotational** meaning, i.e. **that component of the lexical meaning which makes communication possible**. A physicist knows much more about the atom than a singer does but this does not preclude the singer from understanding the scientist when the latter uses the word.

The second component of the lexical meaning is the **connotational** component which consists of **the emotive charge** and the **stylistic value** of the word. Lexical meaning is not homogenous and includes denotational and connotational components. The functions of words are to denote things, concepts and so on. Users of a language cannot have any knowledge or thought of the objects or phenomena of the real world around them unless this knowledge is ultimately embodied in words which have essentially the same meaning for all speakers of that language. This is the denotational meaning, i. e. that component of the lexical meaning which makes communication possible. There is no doubt that a physicist knows more about the atom than a singer does, or that a cooker possesses a much deeper knowledge of how to prepare for example shrimps than a person who cannot cook professionally.

Nevertheless they use the words **atom, shrimps,** etc. and understand each other. Second component of the lexical meaning is the connotational component, i. e. the emotive charge and the stylistic value of the word. Charge is one of the objective semantic features proper to words as linguistic units and forms a part of the connotational component of meaning. The emotive charge varies in different word-classes. In some of them, in interjection, e. g., the emotive element prevails, whereas in conjunctions the emotive charge is as a rule practically non-existence differ not only in their emotive charge but also in their stylistic reference and subdivided into literary, neutral and colloquial layers.

Greater part of the literary layer of Modern English vocabulary are words of general use, possessing no specific stylistic reference and known as neutral words. Against the background of neutral words we can distinguish two major subgroups - standard colloquial words and literary or bookish words: parent, father, dad. In comparison with the word **father** which is stylistically neutral, **dad** stands out as colloquial and **parent** is felt as bookish, or **chum-friend, rot-nonsense,** etc.

Questions for discussion

1. What two meanings are there in semantic structure of the words?
2. How do we define the lexical meaning of the words?
3. What part of speech meaning exist in English?
4. What is the difference between denotational and connotational meaning?
5. Describe grammatical items that form closed sets

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