

Chapter 16

Objective / short questions

SEMANTIC STRUCTURE

The vocabulary of a language contains a number of lexical systems the semantic structure of which can be described in terms of paradigmatic and syntagmatic sense relations, or name-sense relationships which can be divided into five categories:-

1. Synonymy
2. Hyponymy and Incompatibility
3. Antonymy, Complementary and Converseness *communications*
4. Polysemy
5. Homonymy

def: *shiq*
examples -

SYNONYMY

One sense with several names is synonymy, that is two items are synonymous they have the same sense. Lexical items can be regarded as synonymous if they can be interchanged without altering the meaning of a utterance: *dialogues*

e.g.

I saw a madman.
I saw a lunatic.

} → different words
but same meaning.

I saw a maddy.

I saw a bedlamite.

explanation According to John Lyons, term 'synonymy' has two interpretations—a stricter and a looser. The looser interpretation has been illustrated by him by means of a quotation from Roger's Thesaurus. Contents "Suppose we take the word 'nice'. Under it (in the Index) we will see.... various synonyms representing different shades of meaning of the word 'nice'. The 'synonyms' given for nice in the Index are savoury, discriminative, exact, good, pleasing, fastidious and honourable. All these words and expressions are 'synonymous' with nice under the looser interpretation of the idea notion of synonymy.

~~QUALIFICATION~~ QUALIFICATION OF SYNONYM

It is often suggested that synonym is a matter of degree; that any set of lexical items can be arranged on a scale of similarity and difference of sense, so that, for example a and b might be shown to be identical in sense (strictly synonymous), a and c relatively similar in sense (loosely synonymous), a and d less similar in sense, and so on' (Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*)

'TOTAL SYNONYMY' AND 'COMPLETE SYNONYMY'

Dr. Johnson once remarked, 'words are seldom exactly synonymous'. Macaulay also observed: 'Change the structure of the sentence; substitute one synonymy for another and the whole effect is destroyed'. To quote Ullmann: 'it is almost a truism that total synonymy is an extremely rare occurrence, a luxury that language can ill-afford'. "Only those words" says Ullmann. "can be described as synonymous which can replace each other in any given context without the slightest change either in cognitive or emotive import". The low conditions for 'total synonymy' are therefore (i) interchangeability in all contexts, and (ii) identity in both cognitive and emotive import. We will discuss the validity of the distinction

between 'cognitive' and 'emotive' below. On the basis of this distinction, Lyons restricts the term **total synonymy** to those synonyms (whether complete or not) which are interchangeable in all contexts; and used the **complete synonymy** for equivalence of both cognitive and emotive senses. This scheme of classification allows for four possible kinds of synonymy:

'COGNITIVE' AND 'EMOTIVE' MEANING

- (i) complete and total synonymy;
- (ii) complete, but not total;
- (iii) incomplete, but total;
- (iv) incomplete, and not total.

The distinction between 'cognitive' and 'emotive' meaning is based on mental faculties such as intellect, on the one hand, and the imagination and the emotions, on the other. It is often said that by contrast with the vocabulary of scientific and technical discourse, the words of 'everyday language' are charged with emotional 'associations' or 'connotations', over and above their primary, purely 'intellectual' meaning. As cited by Ullmann, **liberty-freedom, hide-conceal** are cognitively synonymous. One word may be preferred to another because of its different emotive or evocative associations. But the extent to which this is of importance varies considerably from one style or situation to another. Since we are concerned with the more general principles of semantic structure, we would not discuss various factors responsible for the acceptability of particular forms rather than with their sense or reference. Rather we would prefer to restrict the term 'synonymy' to 'cognitive synonymy'.

HYPONYMY AND INCOMPATIBILITY

Hyponymy

Hyponymy is frequently referred to as 'inclusion' or 'classification'. For example, the 'meaning' of scarlet is

said to be 'included' in the 'meaning' of red; the 'meaning' of **red** is 'included' in the 'meaning' of **blood**; the 'meaning' of **rose** is said to be 'included' in the 'meaning' of **flower**; and so on. This formulation of the 'inclusion' rests upon the notion of reference.

The way of examining vocabulary is to note the ways in which a language classifies units. In English, for example, **dogs** and **cats** are classified as **domestic animals**. **Lions** and **tigers** are classified together under the general heading of **animals**. And **animals** and **human beings** both come under the heading of **animate beings**.

The vocabulary of English is classified in this way in Roger's **Thesaurus**. Each entry has under it a list of hyponyms (i.e. things classified under it).

Incompatibility

Incompatibility is general defined on the basis of the relationship of contradictoriness between sentences. For example, the following simple, and familiar example from the colour-terms in English; If someone says **John was wearing a red hat**, this will be understood as implicitly denying **John was wearing a green (blue, white, yellow, etc.) hat**. And the substitution of any one of the terms in the set **green, blue, white, yellow, etc.** for **red** would also be taken as implying the denial of **John was wearing a red hat**; The colour-terms therefore form a set of incompatible lexical items.

ANTONYMY, COMPLEMENTARITY AND CONVERSENESS

Oppositeness of meaning has been one of the most important semantic relations. In many languages there are dictionaries of synonyms and antonyms, the study of opposites is quite complex. Some writers use the term **antonym** for all types of opposite, other divide 'oppositeness of meaning' into three sub-categories:

- (i) complementarity.
- (ii) antonymy, and

(iii) converseness.

Complementarity

Complementarity is the relation of oppositeness in pairs of lexical items where the denial of the one implies the assertion of the other and the assertion of the one implies the denial of the other. Thus **James is not married** implies **James is single**; and **James is married** implies **James is not single**. In the case of those terms for which Lyons reserves the term 'antonymy' (e.g. **good-bad**; **high-low**), Only the second of these implications holds **James is good** implies the denial **James is bad**, but **James is not good** does not imply the assertion of **James is bad**.

Antonymy

Antonymy is the relation of oppositeness in pairs of lexical items where the assertion of one implies the denial of the other. For example, **big** and **small**, **little** and **much**, **few** and **many**. These are 'opposites, par excellence'. They are regularly gradable, that is, bound up with the operation of comparison: e.g.

Our house is bigger than yours used to be both implies and is implied by your house used to be smaller than ours is; Our house is bigger than yours implied and is implied by your house is smaller than ours; and our house is bigger than it used to be implies and is implied our house used to be smaller than it is (now).

Converseness

"The third sense-relation which is frequently described in terms of "Oppositeness" is that which holds between **buy** and **sell** or **husband** and **wife**. We will use the term **converseness** to refer to this relation. The word, **buy**, is the converse of **sell**, and **sell**, is the converse of **buy**." (John Lyons)

Since parallelisms exist between antonymy and complementarity, a number of linguists do not make such distinctions and regard all relations of oppositeness as 'antonyms'.

POLYSEMY

Polysemy or poly semantic is generally defined as "having several, often quite different, meanings, all derived from the basic idea or concept" (*Dictionary of Linguistics*, 1954). The lexicographer lists **hymonyms** as different words, whereas polysemy is a term used in traditional semantics for the word having multiple meaning but given under one entry by the lexicographer. For example, 'human head', 'head of department', 'bridge-head'. Hence polysemy means that one word can have more than one sense. The distinction between homonymy and polysemy is by and large indeterminate and arbitrary, resting upon either the lexicographer's judgement about the plausibility of the assumed 'extension' of meaning or some historical evidence that the particular 'extension' has in fact taken place.

The most prevalent type of polysemy is the result of ordinary contextual **shifts in application**. Adjectives are particularly prone to this kind of shift. For instance the different meaning of **red in red ink, red deer, red cabbage and Red Indian**.

Specialization in milieu is another common cause of polysemy, e.g. **partner, in business partner, marriage partner, partner in crime, room partner**. Partner contains the basic meaning of a type of a relationship between two (or more) people. But a **business partner** is not what a **marriage partner** is.

Another, and very frequent type of polysemy, is that created by **metaphor**, e.g. **human body, heavenly body, body politic, body (of a liquid)**, etc.

COLLOCATION

While studying the structure of the vocabulary, **collocation** can be defined as the association of a lexical item with other lexical items. It refers to the syntagmatic, horizontal relationship of lexical items (derived from the Latin **colloco** to be in same place with'). **Ink**, for example, collocates with (is found with)

words such as **pen, paper, letter, note-book, inkpot, blue, red, green, royal, blue, etc.** Red collocates with **roses, blood, ink, apple, tomato, etc.** Sea collocates with **rough, cruel, raging blue, etc.** Climb collocates with **mountain, hill, tree, peak.**

Collocation (Syntagmatic)

The mountaineer climbed to the top of the mountain peak.

But care should be taken while studying idioms, clichés and compound words which pose problems, and cannot be dissected satisfactorily.

SETS

The relationship of collocation enables us to group items into lexical sets. The lexical set is formally defined as a grouping of words having approximately the same range of collocations, having the same contextual range, functioning in the same situation types. Whereas collocation refers to the syntagmatic relationship, set refers to paradigmatic, vertical relationships of lexical items. A lexical set, therefore, is 'group of lexical items from a similar class which seem to belong together'. Each item in set is defined by its place in relation to the other members of the set. **Adolescent**, for example, is the stage of growth between **child** and **adult**. **Cool** is the temperature between **cold** and **warm**. Similarly **good, bad, nice, excellent, fair** are items of a set.



From the above table this impression should not be formed that a semantic field is divided up like a smooth mosaic. In fact, the items overlap, leave gaps and have fuzzy edges.

Furthermore, in two sets such as (1) **dogs, ran, stairs;** and (2) **a, the, down** the, first set (dog, ran, stairs) is of **content** words and the second one (a, the, down) is that of **structure** words. The content words refer to 'things', 'actions' or 'events' in the real world, whereas the **structure** words do not have this quality. In the former set, all the words can be inflected; **dog** and **stair** for 'plural' (**dogs and stairs**) and **run** for 'past tense; (ran); But in the latter set, **a, the, and down** cannot be inflected. Thirdly, the first set is an 'open' set whereas the second set is a 'closed set', that is words capable of taking inflections are being added to the language continually as new nouns and verbs are created, but, no new determiners (**a, the**) or preposition (**down**) are being created in the same manner. A closed set of items is one of fixed and usually small membership: e.g. the set of personal pronouns, tense, genders, etc. An open set is one of unrestricted, indeterminately large, membership, e.g. the class of nouns or verbs in a language. Thus grammatical items belong to closed sets, and lexical items, to open sets. (also see Chapter 16).

Difference between Collocation and Set

Collocation is outside grammar; it has no connection with the classes of the word. It is syntagmatic. Set is the closest analogy to the grammatical system; it is a set of possible terms available for choice under the same grammatical conditions. In collocation the choice is limited, in lexical set the choice is not limited. The former is an open system, the latter closed. The one is syntagmatic, horizontal, the other paradigmatic, vertical. (See Ch. 24).

COMPONENTIAL ANALYSIS

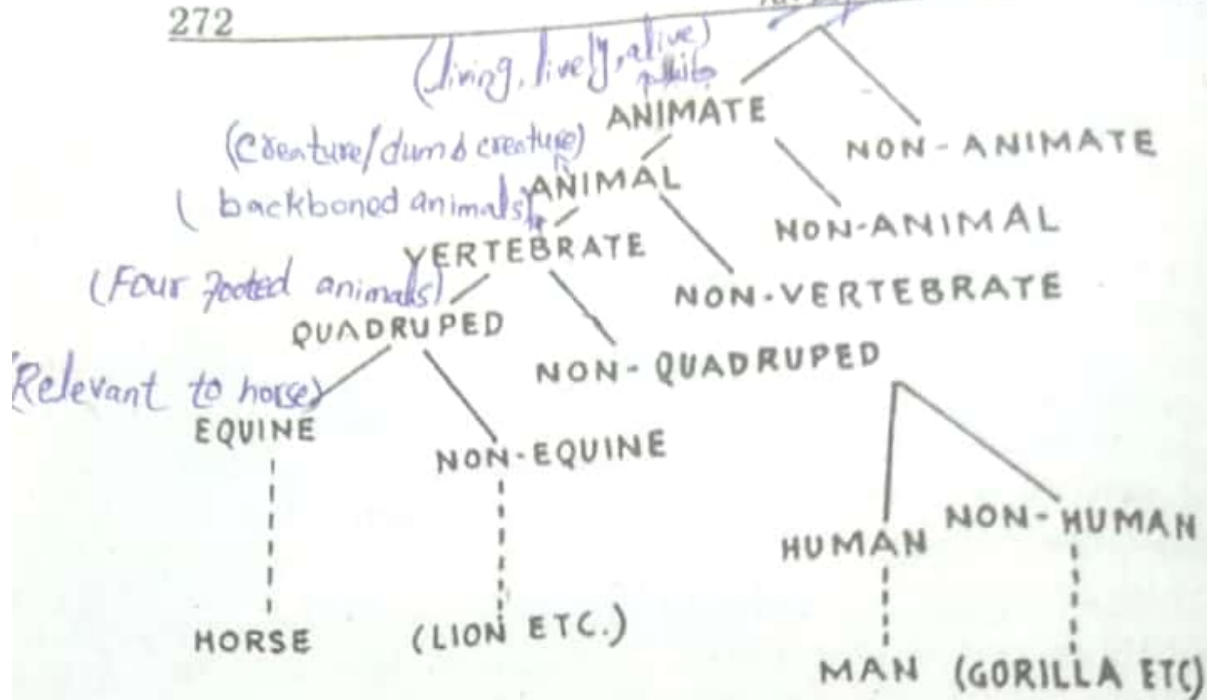
The study of collocation, sets, synonyms opposites and classification polysemy, hyponymy enables a useful grid of internal relationships between lexical items to be drawn up. But there still remains a problem. How in a semantic analysis, can one account for the fact that lexical items overlap? **Cow**, and **woman** and **tigress**, for example, all contain some element of **femaleness**. **Bull** and **cow** both contain some element of **bovineness**. **Calf** and **puppy** and **baby** all contain an element of **non-adulthood**.

Such reasoning has led to attempt to split items up into their component parts, or features. **Woman**, for example, is said to contain the semantic features of **FEMALE**, **HUMAN**, **ADULT**. **Cow** has the features of **FEMALE**, **BOVINE**, **ADULT**. The list of features is inexhaustive.

This type of analysis is comparable to distinctive feature analysis in phonology. This technique has only been exploited recently by linguists, and is known as componential analysis.

✓ imp HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE OF SEMANTIC FEATURES

Several attempts ^{to try} have been made recently to classify the features in certain fields into a **hierarchy**, in which more general features appear near the top and more specific ones lower down. The following diagram is widely used to illustrate this point in linguistic circles:-
explain



It is obvious from the above drawing that the number of semantic features varies from lexical item to lexical item. Fairly general items such as **human being**, **animal**, **foodstuff** have relatively few components. But more specific items such as **bus-conductors**, **giraffe**, **cheese** have a larger number.

And more specified features (features low down on the tree) imply more general features (features higher up on the tree). So the feature EQUINE implies also the feature QUADRUPED, VERTEBRATE, ANIMAL and ANIMATE.

But binary splits are not always possible. In some semantic fields, pairs are difficult to identify—and may be non-existent. A notorious example is the field of colours. Another problem is that features cannot always be organised hierarchically. In features such as MALE and ADULT, there is no reason to suppose that the feature ADULT is more general than the feature MALE or that the feature MALE is more general than the feature ADULT. Neither implies the other, so they cannot be a hierarchy. Features such as these which cannot be hierarchically classified in relation to one another are known as **classifying** features.

TYPICAL QUESTIONS

1. Distinguish between collocation and set.
 2. What is polysemy? Give some illustrations of polysemy.
 3. What is synonymy? *and examples-*
 4. Distinguish between **total synonymy** and **complete synonymy**.
 5. Define and illustrate **hyponymy**.
 6. Distinguish three types of opposites found in language.
 7. What is **componential analysis**?
 8. What is meant by the **hierarchical structure** of semantic features?
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