

NICOLETA DANIELA PÂRÂIAC

# Knowing a word means...

**EDITURA CARTEA VRÂNCEANĂ**  
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## **Introduction**

Vocabulary is a crucial component for efficient communication in the second language classroom. While grammar is important, an inadequacy and scarcity of vocabulary may result in complete fiasco to transmit a message.

Associating a content word to its rational semantic relations is considered a language learning strategy which explicitly contributes to mental lexicon. Semantic mapping seems to constitute an efficient pattern for its practice in language instruction. But, it appears to be among the least used vocabulary learning strategies in language classrooms.

With hundreds of thousands of words in the English language, teaching vocabulary can seem like a very discouraging activity. But, it is not necessary for our students to produce all the words they learn. Some of them they will just need to recognize.

Making a selection based on frequency and usefulness of words to be taught related to the needs of our students is essential. Once the items chosen, the next important steps are to take into account what students need to know about the items, and how they can be taught.

Children learn vocabulary, grammar, and syntax in the context of their family at first. Then, they are made conscious of their choices of vocabulary, grammar, and syntax in school where they also learn how to build upon the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax they already know.

Chapter 1 points out that the process of acquiring a language, a hard work which needs constant effort in many stages: understanding, repeating, adapting and applying in speaking and writing.

Vocabulary must be learned item by item. Using vocabulary inaccurately doesn't necessarily change the meaning of a text, it does weaken it. It is not enough to know the meaning of a word. A single word can have multiple spellings, meanings, pronunciations, contexts and collocations.

*"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug."*

(Mark Twain-*"The Wit and the Wisdom of Mark Twain"*)

Chapter 2 examines the main principle of grouping words proceeding from the basic types of semantic relations and Chapter 3 examines what pedagogical grammars have said so far about the teaching of the English vocabulary through semantic relations. I will try to show that, in everyday use, meaning goes beyond just learning

the dictionary meaning. A strong understanding of words helps us know where to use words in a sentence, how and where to use in a social setting, what all the possible meanings are for a word, and what other words might be used in their place.

It also examines the environments in which vocabulary errors occur. After reviewing the findings from other researchers pertaining to the acquisition of vocabulary, I will look at the actual errors learners make, assuming that there is some influence of the first language system.

As a teacher, I always try to find effective ways to present new elements of language and keep students' enthusiasm in attempting to get them. A classroom with enthusiastic and motivated learners is a place where learning will take place in an efficient, comfortable and pleasant manner.

# **Chapter I**

## **Teaching Vocabulary**

Teaching words is an essential aspect in learning a language as languages are based on words and it is impossible to learn a language without words. Both teachers and students agree that acquiring vocabulary is an important factor in teaching a language because communication between human beings is based on words.

Many teachers are not confident about the best methods and techniques in vocabulary teaching and at times do not know where to begin to form an instructional emphasis on word learning, so that teaching an effective usage of word meaning may be problematic show recent researches.

One of the most discussed parts of teaching English as a foreign language is teaching vocabulary. Teachers should be concerned that teaching vocabulary is something different from student's native language. Problems would appear to the teachers when the teaching and learning process takes place. They have problems of how to teach students in order to achieve satisfying results. The teacher should prepare and find out the adequate

techniques, which will be used on students. A good teacher should prepare himself/herself with various and up-to-date techniques.

Teachers need to be able to master the material in order to be understood by students, and make them interested and happy in the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

### **I.1. Brief background of vocabulary instruction**

During the last several years the teaching of vocabulary has become very important to language learning. Learners and teachers altogether agree that knowing words and combinations of words leads to an effective developing of the ability to communicate.

In this chapter, I plan to write a brief background of vocabulary teaching because not too much attention was given in the language teaching/ learning process in the past. Some authors assert that vocabulary teaching was traditionally undervalued and teachers gave little attention to techniques to help students learn vocabulary as well. Years ago, vocabulary was considered a neglected aspect in the process of language instruction. For many years, vocabulary teaching was not given the importance and attention that it deserves in the English classes. Methodology

courses didn't say much about how to teach words and words meaning. Experts in methodology believed that the meaning of words could not be taught in a proper way, so it was better not to try to teach them. Many teachers began to notice that vocabulary instruction is not an easy matter. They used to discuss about the difficulty to predict what vocabulary students would need and used to think that if they gave over attention to vocabulary, learners would have the impression that learning a language was just the acquisition of a big number of words. They felt insecure about teaching vocabulary in the classroom so, teachers started not to teach vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction is not only a matter of teaching that a certain word in one language means the same as a word in another language therefore much more needs to be learned.

Methodology specialists fear students would make mistakes in sentence construction if too many words were learned before the basic grammar knowledge.<sup>1</sup> This idea is partially true because it is not enough to know a large number of meaning words to construct a sentence with sense. This means that students without a basic knowledge of grammar can make mistakes when making sentences.

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<sup>1</sup> Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. 1988. *Vocabulary and language teaching*, London, Longman.

Thus, “without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed”<sup>2</sup>. This means that without a reliable base of vocabulary acquisition a student cannot communicate successfully. Without an appropriate mastering of grammar students cannot communicate effectively but, the lack of vocabulary leads to the inability to communicate. Beginning students often manage to communicate in English by using the accumulative effect of individual words. A sentence such as “Yesterday, cook cakes with my mother.” will express much of its message in spite of avoiding grammar. The meaning is transmitted by the vocabulary alone and a good knowledge of grammar is not so important for understanding the message in this case. So, vocabulary knowledge is one of the most important components of language comprehension.

Presently, vocabulary teaching is seen as a meaningful lexical instrument to be taught and learnt in meaningful contexts. In spite of the neglected aspect of

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<sup>2</sup> Wilkins, D. 1972. *Linguistics in language teaching*, London, Arnold, p.111.

vocabulary instruction in the past, its teaching and learning have been given much attention in the classroom in the last two decades. Still, instead of giving students long list of words without any context as teachers used to do in the past, some teachers are more and more concerned about effective ways to transmit knowledge of vocabulary to students.

In the recent years, teachers have approached successful strategies to teach vocabulary so that teaching vocabulary has come a long way and it is becoming more ubiquitous. Teachers are becoming aware of the importance and relevance of the vocabulary instruction and of their role as facilitators and guides. They have given important attention to call students' interest to the importance of focus on lexical form. Difficulties in vocabulary learning cannot be separated from vocabulary instruction. So, the next level intends to show how vocabulary acquisition is developed by learners.

## **I.2 Vocabulary-What knowing a word means**

The noun *vocabulary* came to refer to the “range of language of a person or group” in 1700, about two hundred years later after first being used to mean a list of words with explanations

English has a very large vocabulary consisting of more than a million words, with three main aspects related to form, meaning and use, as well as layers of meaning connected to the roots of individual words. Vocabulary is very important for the students in learning English especially for communication to construct the meaning and make a language.

Teaching vocabulary is not just about using any kind of methods for the students to learn new words; it involves lexical phrases and knowledge of English vocabulary and how to bring out new and catching ways of learning and teaching it.

Vocabulary, as one of the knowledge areas in language, plays a great role for learners in acquiring a language. Researchers assert that the development of learners' vocabulary is an important aspect of their language development. They have increasingly been turning their attention to vocabulary, though it has been neglected for a long time e.g. Carter and McCarthy (1988), Nation (1990), Arnaud and Bejoint (1992), Huckin, Haynes and Coady (1995), Coady and Huckin (1997), Schmitt (1997, 2000) Read (1997). Recent vocabulary researches center on the understanding of lexis, the Greek for word, which in English "refers to all the words in a language, the entire

vocabulary of a language”<sup>3</sup>. But vocabulary is not just about individual words but much more.

Vocabulary also includes lexical chunks, two or more words used together, such as Good evening and See you soon, which are taught as single lexical units to learners. Phrases like these involve more than one word but have a clear usage and make up a significant piece of spoken or written English language usage.

So vocabulary can be defined as the words of a language or a special set of words which express a particular meaning. Vocabulary is not all about single words, words with specific meaning(s) but it also includes lexical phrases or chunks.

In this connection, the term vocabulary is used to denote a system formed by the sum of all the words and word equivalents that the language possesses. **Word-n.-1.** A sound or a combination of sounds, or its representation in writing or printing, that symbolizes and communicates a meaning and may consist of a single morpheme or of a combination of morphemes.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Barcroft, J., Schmitt, N., & Sunderman, G. 2011. *Lexis*. In J. Simpson (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Applied Linguistics*, Abingdon, UK / New York: Routledge, p.571.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/words>

**Word** – *“the basic unit of language, directly corresponds to the object of thought (referent) – which is a generalized reverberation of a certain 'slice', 'piece' of objective reality – and by immediately referring to it names the thing meant”*.<sup>5</sup>

**Word** - the smallest significant unit of speech. (Aristotle)

**Word** - a microcosms of human consciousness. (Vygotsky)

But what is involved in knowing a word? The question has fascinated many psychologists, sometimes with consequences of considerable practical value to the science. Among more important examples is Galton (1879) experimenting with word associations, Binet (1911) using word tasks to test mental age, Thorndike (1921) trying to determine what words every high school graduate should know, Ogden (1934) selecting 850 words to define Basic English, or Bühler (1934) analyzing deictic words that acquire referential value from the contexts in which they are used. Clearly, word knowledge has provided fertile ground for psychological studies; the reason may be that it raises fundamental questions. What does a person who knows a word know? An on the spot answer is that a person who knows a word must know its meaning(s).

**Meaning-n.**- 1. What something expresses or represents.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ranez.ru/article/id/366/>

Knowing a word involves knowing its meaning, its contexts of use and how the meaning of one item relates to the meaning of others.

A person who knows a word knows much more than its meaning and pronunciation. The contexts in which a word can be used to express a particular meaning are a critical component of word knowledge.

What does word knowledge involves?

Besides the definition, another critical question in need of a definite answer is what knowing a word involves. As one of the pioneering attempts, Richards has listed some aspects of a word a learner should know:<sup>6</sup>

- Knowing a word means knowing the *degree of probability of encountering* that word in speech or print. For many words we also know the sort of *words most likely to be found associated* with the word.
- Knowing a word implies knowing *the limitations on the use* of the word according to variations of function and situation.

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<sup>6</sup> Read, J. 2000. *Assessing vocabulary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.25.

- Knowing a word means knowing the *syntactic behavior* associated with the word.
- Knowing a word entails the knowledge of the *underlying form* of a word and the *derivations* that can be made from it.
- Knowing a word entails *knowledge of the network of associations* between that word and other words in the language.
- Knowing a word means knowing the *semantic value* of a word.
- Knowing a word means knowing *many of the different meanings* associated with a word.

Nation goes further and introduces an analytical table, adding other components and the distinction between receptive and productive knowledge<sup>7</sup>.

<b>Form</b>	
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<sup>7</sup> Nation, I. S. P. 1990. *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Boston, Mass.: Heinle & Heinle Publishers. p.31.

<i>Spoken form</i>	R What does the word sound like? P How is the word pronounced?
<i>Written form</i>	R What does the word look like? P How is the word written and spelled?
<b>Position</b> <i>Grammatical</i> <i>Patterns</i> <i>Collocations</i>	R In what patterns does the word occur? P In what patterns must we use the word? R What words or types of words can be expected before or after the word? P What words or types of words must be used with this word?
<b>Function</b> <i>Frequency</i> <i>Appropriateness</i>	R How common is the word? P How often the word should be used? R Where would we expect to meet the word? P Where can this word be used?
<b>Meaning</b> <i>Concept</i> <i>Associations</i>	R What does the word mean? P What word should be used to express this meaning?

	<p>R What other words does this word make us think of?</p> <p>P What other words could we use instead of this one?</p>
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Table 1. *1 Knowing a word (Nation, 1990) (R=receptive, P=productive)*

The table represents what Nation (1990) terms as the *learning burden* which learners face in their lexical acquisition. In addition, according to the authors, it informs teachers’ design of tools and activities to share and diminish the learner’s *burden*, reminding them to go deeper under the surface layers of word knowledge.

### **I.3 How can lexical knowledge be acquired?**

Vocabulary cognition is not something that can ever be fully learned; it is something that expands over a lifetime. Teaching and learning vocabulary involves more than looking up words in a dictionary and using the words in a sentence.

Starting from primary school word knowledge can predict how well students will be able to comprehend texts they read in the following

school years. Limited vocabularies are obstacles in understanding a text.

Poor readers often quit reading or read less, because reading is difficult for them. This step back means they don't have the chance to improve their vocabularies, which could, in turn, help them comprehend more. This perpetuating cycle can mean that as students continue through middle school and high school, the gap between good and poor readers becomes deeper and deeper. That is why every day, in our schools, a growing number of teachers of non-English speakers search for an essential tool their students need to make learning easier and even more pleasant.

Studies on teaching vocabulary concluded that there is no single research-based method for teaching it. From their analysis, using a variety of direct and indirect methods of vocabulary instruction is recommended.

Vocabulary is acquired intentionally through explicit instruction in specific words and word-learning strategies and incidentally through indirect exposure to words

Michael Graves (2000), identified four components of an

effective vocabulary program:<sup>8</sup>

1. Wide or extensive independent reading to expand word knowledge;
2. Instruction in specific words to enhance comprehension of texts containing those words;
3. Instruction in independent word-learning strategies;
4. Word consciousness and word-play activities to motivate and enhance learning.

### **I.3.1 Intentional vocabulary learning**

It is well known that much vocabulary is acquired through wide independent reading, also known as incidental learning. Yet, to develop vocabulary intentionally, students should be explicitly taught both specific words and word-learning strategies, explicit instruction helping them learn enough words to become better readers and acquire even more words. Highly effective in this

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/teaching-vocabulary><sup>8</sup> Read, J. 2000. *Assessing vocabulary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.25.

<sup>8</sup> Nation, I. S. P. 1990. *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Boston, Mass.: Heinle & Heinle Publishers. p.31.

situation is the direct instruction or explicit instruction of vocabulary.

Although, direct vocabulary instruction is useful for all students, at all knowledge levels, it is particularly useful for beginners who have a limited reading vocabulary and little exposure to incidental vocabulary learning outside of school.

Specific word instruction should be solid in order to deepen students' knowledge of word meanings. "Seeing vocabulary in rich contexts provided by authentic texts, rather than in isolated vocabulary drills, produces robust vocabulary learning"<sup>9</sup> Rich and robust vocabulary instruction goes beyond definitional knowledge. It gets students actively engaged in using and thinking about word meanings and in creating relationships among words, for the ability to give a definition is often the result of knowing what the word means.

Students come to school with greatly varying vocabularies. Some will know more word meanings than others

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<sup>9</sup> National Reading Panel. 2000. *Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, available on <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/teaching-vocabulary>

in class. This occurs partly because of the differences in the number of new words students are exposed to in their homes and communities. Students who come from homes where vocabulary is limited will know less words than students who come from homes where exposure to a wide range of vocabulary is common.

Studies show that the average student learns about 3,000 words a year, or six to eight words a day. That is a remarkable accomplishment only if students are taught eight to ten new words per week for 37 to 50 weeks. Thus direct instruction can help students acquire about 300 to 500 words per year.<sup>10</sup>

A large amount of words is to be learned through independent reading, which is essential to acquiring word knowledge.

Although the percentage of words learned through direct instruction may seem small, it is highly important. Studies revealed that even a 10 per cent gain out of the number of words

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<sup>10</sup> Stahl, Steven A. *Vocabulary Development*. Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books, 1999. available online [http://eps.schoolspecialty.com/EPS/media/Site-Resources/Downloads/articles/Why\\_Teach\\_Vocabulary.pdf](http://eps.schoolspecialty.com/EPS/media/Site-Resources/Downloads/articles/Why_Teach_Vocabulary.pdf)

learned by a student, during a school year is educationally very significant if repeated year after year. The direct instruction of word meanings combined with discussions about words and word parts and encouragement of wide reading is the best way to help students develop vocabulary.

However a small vocabulary does not predict failure—it only highlights the need for direct vocabulary instruction in schools. Vocabulary development is a reachable goal and the key to increasing it is exposure to new words, not necessary an innate ability to learn from context. Experts highlight the fact that, if given the opportunity to learn new words as well as effective instruction, most students can acquire vocabulary at rates that will improve their comprehension. This enables them to read permanently challenging texts with fluency and improve their chances for success in school and after school years.

### **I.3.2. Incidental vocabulary learning**

Even though students are taught vocabulary in class, followed by practice activities not too much time is allocated to further consolidation as the syllabus is imposed and needs to be covered within one school year. Accordingly, the mastery of the

words taught in class depends largely on the students themselves and on their approach to vocabulary learning.

Researches on vocabulary instruction reveal that most vocabulary is learnt incidentally. The indirect exposure to words determines students to acquire vocabulary incidentally by engaging in rich oral-language experiences at home and at school, listening to e-books or books read aloud to them, and reading widely on their own. “Reading volume is very important in terms of long-term vocabulary development”<sup>11</sup>. Extensive reading gives students the opportunity to multiple and repeated exposures to words and in the same time, is one of the methods by which students see vocabulary in different contexts, providing structured read-aloud, discussion sessions and extending independent reading experiences outside school hours and encourage vocabulary growth in students. Incidental learning vocabulary is a useful way to acquire new words for advanced learners while intentional learning is important for beginners. Accordingly, learning in an explicit way the most frequently used words and increasing the depth of knowledge of

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<sup>11</sup> Cunningham, A.E., & Stanovich, K.E. Early reading acquisition and its relation to reading experience and ability 10 years later. 1998. *Developmental Psychology*, p. 33,934–945.

these words through incidental learning is a desirable outcome in terms of explicit-incidental vocabulary learning.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Semantic Pre-requisites**

#### **II.1. Semantic field**

In the last few years, more and more linguists have started to analyze more the importance of semantic field theory in order to develop the language abilities and efficiency. Students find it difficult to remember all the English words at the same time because some words look very alike, such as *consideration* and *considering*, *fascinated* and *fascinating*, *lighted* and *lightening*, etc. Since semantic field theory studies the relationship between a group of

words in a certain category, the suitable use of semantic field theory will make English vocabulary learning much easier.

### **What is semantic field theory exactly?**

Before componential analysis appeared as a first objective approach to describe word meaning, linguists distinguished and analyzed “semantic fields” as sets of words grouped according to their relational meaning that is closely interrelated. Originally, “field” was a concept applied in physics which described the layout condition of a certain object, such as electric field, magnetic field and gravitational field, which separately shows the layout principles of electricity, magnesium and gravity in a certain space. It is also used in anthropology, computational semiotics and technical exegesis. This concept was later applied into linguistics to describe the inter-relationship between different words. Gradually, it turned into a new linguistic approach called semantic field theory.

Although the first study of semantic field theory is traced back in the 19th century made by the famous German linguist, the founder of common linguistics, W. Humboldt, the linguists who proposed the idea of semantic field theory on a real sense were the German and Swiss structuralism linguists from 1930s, J. Trier, Ipsen, Jolls and Porzig. Among all these brilliant linguists, J. Trier’s idea is accepted

most widely, people considering that his idea has brought semantics to a new level.

Trier's semantic field theory proposes that "a group of words with interrelated meanings can be categorized under a larger conceptual domain"<sup>12</sup>. This relation is thus known as a semantic field. For example, the words *cut*, *bake*, *peel*, *grate* and *boil*, are part of the larger semantic category of *cooking*. Semantic relations refer to any connection in meaning between words but semantic field theory asserts that lexical meaning can't be completely understood by analyzing single units, but by looking at groups of semantically interrelated words.

Every word has two aspects that interact: the inner aspect that is its meaning and the outer aspect, its sound form. Meaning and sound are not always a unit even in the same language.

E.g. words like : **book**: as reservation or as a sort of written document;

**lie**: don't tell the truth or take a rest

**bear**: big animal or carry .

In these examples we speak about homonyms.

One and the same word in different syntactical relations can

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<sup>12</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexical\\_semantics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexical_semantics)

develop different meanings, e.g. the verb *treat* in sentences:

- a) He treated my jokes as a serious deal.
- b) The study treats SF books.
- c) They treated me with kindness.
- d) He treats animals cruelly.

In all these sentences the verb *treat* has multiple meanings that are related to each other and we can speak about polysemy.

On the other hand, the same meaning can be expressed by different lexical units, e.g. *intelligent* and *smart*, *important* and *essential*. In these situations we can speak about synonyms.

On the other hand, *board* primarily means a piece of wood sawn thin. It has developed the meanings: a table, a board of a ship, a stage, a council,<sup>13</sup> etc.

The meaning and the sound can develop independently in the course of time.

Knowing the meaning of a lexical item means knowing the semantic implications the word brings with it. However, it is also possible to understand just one word of a semantic field without understanding other related words. For example, a taxonomy of

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ranez.ru/article/id/366/><sup>13</sup>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexical\\_semantics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lexical_semantics)

animals: it is possible to understand the words *horse* and *cow* without knowing what a *mare* or a *stallion* or a *calf* and an *ox* is. A semantic field can therefore be large or small, depending on the level of contrast made between lexical items. While *dog* and *cat* pertain to the larger semantic field of *animal*, including the breed of dog, like *German shepherd*, would require contrasts between other kinds of dogs (e.g. *mops*, or *beagle*), thus enlarging the semantic field more.

## **II.2. Semantically related words:**

### **II.2.1. Linguistic perspective**

Consisting of a series of interrelating systems and not just a random collection of items, it is a clear case to present items to the student in a systematized manner. This illustrates both the organized nature of vocabulary and at the same time capacitates him to learn the items in a logical way.

Seal (1991) is one of the few authors of ESL textbooks who has mentioned his rationale for presenting new vocabulary items in semantic clusters. He provides two reasons:

- he claims that they give students the sense of structure they need.

- he feels that these clusters can help students foretell the meaning of new words within the lexical sets.

Of course, where one can easily see that a word's class membership might be clear from its inclusion in a semantic set, it is difficult to see how the specific meaning could be guessed from such membership.

Presenting the new words organized in semantic clusters can be of great help for the learner to understand the semantic implications and to learn the limits of using an item. Thus, semantic clustering has the purpose to help the learner see the differences between semantically related words, to provide a clear context for learning, to facilitate and speed up the learning process.

## **II.2.2 Methodological perspective**

The process of learning new words in semantic clusters upholds the necessity of two approaches in second language acquisition: the structure-centered methodology and the learner centered

methodology. According to Tinkham<sup>14</sup>, curriculum designer of a structure-centered persuasion, especially those driven by a syntax-based methodology, consider semantic clusters to fit nicely into the open gaps within structures targeted by substitution drills or tables, and thus allows students to change the meaning of the sentences they produce.

For example, in Revision 1 of *Welcome, Pupil's Book 2* (p.22)<sup>15</sup>, four types of nationalities, including (*French, Greek, American, Turkish*) are presented as fillers for the gaps, "*Britain - ...*"; "*Greece - ...*"etc. Another example is Unit 9 of the same *Welcome, Pupil's Book*, (p.60): *headache, backache, earache, toothache* and *stomachache* are possible fillers in the sentences, "*Mike has got ...*" Through these substitution activities with semantic clusters, learners are able to become familiar with specific syntactic structures.

Many curriculum writers also followed a more learner-centered approach, producing the course syllabus based on what they perceive language learners need to communicate in English, in terms of situations (e.g., *going to see a doctor*), notions (e.g.

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<sup>14</sup> Tinkham, T.M.1997. *The effect of semantic clustering on the learning of second language vocabulary*. New York.Sage Publications, p.372.

<sup>15</sup> Gray,E. and Evans,V. 2013.*Welcome, Pupil's Book 2*, U.K.:Express Publishing. p.22.

*expressions of time, location*), or functions (e.g. *requests*). These course designers choose vocabulary according to various situations, notions and functions, and many semantically related words seem to inevitably appear in the same situations, notions or functions<sup>16</sup>. For example, *sick, dizzy, nauseous, and tired* are all adjectives learners might use to describe their health<sup>17</sup>.

*Notional syllabi* offers further justification for semantic clusters. The notional syllabi is an idea proposed by Wilkins (1976) who provides justification for semantic clusters through focusing on *what speaks communicate through language*. The basic idea is that *content supersedes form*. Therefore, Wilkins suggests a number of notional categories and lists expressions which would fit within each category. Once again, as with thematically inspired syllabi, the expressions grouped in notional syllabi tend to form semantic clusters. For example, *confirm, corroborate, endorse, support, assent, acquiesce, agree, concur, consent, ratify, and approve* are listed under the category "agreement". According to Wilkins "it is probably necessary to establish a number of themes

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<sup>16</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/34082597\\_The\\_effects\\_of\\_semantic\\_and\\_thematic\\_clustering\\_on\\_the\\_learning\\_of\\_second\\_language\\_vocabulary](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/34082597_The_effects_of_semantic_and_thematic_clustering_on_the_learning_of_second_language_vocabulary)

around which semantically related items can be grouped and from which in constructing a notional syllabus an appropriate selection can be made"<sup>18</sup>. Once the idea of a notional syllabus became popular in second language development, it became the common to use semantic clusters in ESL textbooks based on this approach.

### **II.3. Semantic classification of words**

E. Coşeriu points out that semantic relations should be meaning relations, rather than relations between signs. Only in this way semantic structures can be distinguished from simple associative fields which are based on similarity relations between linguistic signs both on the expression and on the content level. The primary task of linguistics is to study the relational network encompassing the elements of language.

The two branches of linguistics that study the main relations between words are semasiology and onomasyology which identify two different perspectives of study."A brief look at the etymology of these terms reveals a distinction between meaning and naming.

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<sup>18</sup> Wilkins, D.A. 1979.*Notional Syllabuses*. UK: Oxford University Press, p.76.

Semasiology studies the word and its semantic values as *sema* means sign in Greek, while *onoma* means name and accounts for the opposite direction in the study of meaning, that is, it starts from the semantic value and investigates by which expression a particular concept can be designated.”<sup>19</sup>

„Each linguistic evolution is produced on the one hand within the framework of a semasiological structure and on the other within the framework of an onomasiological structure”<sup>20</sup>

There are many ways for two words to be related. Of the many ways that lexical semantics can be studied, we'll look in general terms at the meaning relationships that word meanings have and the semantic features that help to differentiate similar words. Lexical semantics focuses on meanings in isolation, that is, without attention to their contribution to reference or truth conditions.

Lexical items bring information about category, form and meaning. The semantics relate to these categories then relate to each lexical item in the lexicon. Lexical items can also be semantically classified based on whether their meanings are derived from single lexical units or from their surrounding environment.

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<sup>19</sup> Neagu, M. 2015. *Fundamentals of Semantics and Pragmatics*. (co-autor Claudia Pisoschi), Craiova: Universitaria, p.49.

<sup>20</sup> Baldinger, K. 1980. *Semantic theory*. Oxford: Basil Blakwell, p.308.

They participate in regular patterns of association with each other. Some relations between lexical items include hyponymy, hypernymy, synonymy and antonymy, as well as homonymy. Semasiology studies the semantic structure of single expressions- polysemy and homonymy, while onomasiology studies sets of related concepts expressed by sense relations such as synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy.<sup>21</sup>

#### II.4. Basic principles of grouping words

“Words are being used to learn other words”

Andy	gave	his	amazing	car
	donated		extraordinary	motorcycle
	handed out		exceptional	bicycle
	sold		marvelous	
			ordinary	

*Table II.1 Paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships between words*

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<sup>21</sup> Neagu, M. 2015. *Fundamentals of Semantics and Pragmatics*. (co-autor Claudia Pisoschi), Craiova: Universitaria, p.49.

There are two types of relationships between the words of a language: a paradigmatic relationship and a syntagmatic relationship. The **paradigmatic** relationship refers to the relation between words that are the same parts of speech and which can replace each other within a given sentence. A **syntagmatic** relationship refers to the relation of a word with the other words around it, to the ability to make connections with other words in order to produce functional units such as phrases, collocations or word groups.

In the example above, paradigmatic relationships are shown vertically and syntagmatic relationship, horizontally.

### **Paradigmatic (vertical) axis**

The words *snowdrop*, *carnation*, *hyacinth* and *tulip* are related to each other because they all belong to the same semantic group: *flowers* - a relationship known as **hyponymy** with *flowers* as a hypernym (a superordinate word) and *snowdrop*, *carnation*, *hyacinth* and *tulip* as hyponyms (specific words). The other two kinds of paradigmatic relationship are those of **synonymy** (*give=hand out*) and **antonymy** (*amazing=ordinary*).

John Sinclair argues: "the tradition of linguistic theory has been massively biased in favour of the paradigmatic rather than the syntagmatic dimension."<sup>22</sup>

Paradigmatic relationships are mainly emphasised in English language teaching and in textbooks, vocabulary teaching focusing mainly on this type of relationship between words: e.g. matching synonyms and antonyms, grouping words according to sets. How the meaning of one word relates to the meaning of others can be very useful in teaching. In the following chapters are some of the main relationships.

## II.4.1 Polysemy

**Word origin:** Greek  *poli* = many, *sêma* = sign

In linguistics, polysemy is the feature of a word to express multiple meanings, its ability to indicate either more semantic traits of the same object, or the common semantic characteristic of several objects.

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<sup>22</sup> Sinclair, J. M. 2004. *Trust the text: Language, corpus and discourse*. London and New York: Routledge, p.140.

A polysemantic word has several identical phonetic bodies reunited by a common feature.

E.g. *book*-1. a bound collection of pages

2. a text reproduced and distributed (thus, someone who has read the same text on a computer has read the same book as someone who had the actual paper volume)

3. to make an action or event a matter of record (e.g. "Unable to book a hotel room, a man sneaked into a nearby private residence where police arrested him and later booked him for unlawful entry.")

The polysemic words are generally microsystems organized by meanings, linked by logical relationships. All starts from a basic meaning and derive to secondary meanings, this motivating relationship being still perceived by the speakers. The basic meaning is not necessarily identical to the primary meaning, etymological and it is independent of the contexts, while the derived meanings are syntactically conditioned by certain associations entered into vocabulary use.

Polysemy is very present in the English vocabulary due to the monosyllabic character of English words and the predominance of root words.

The most part of the lexicon of a language is polysemic, polysemy being an important means of enriching the vocabulary. Some

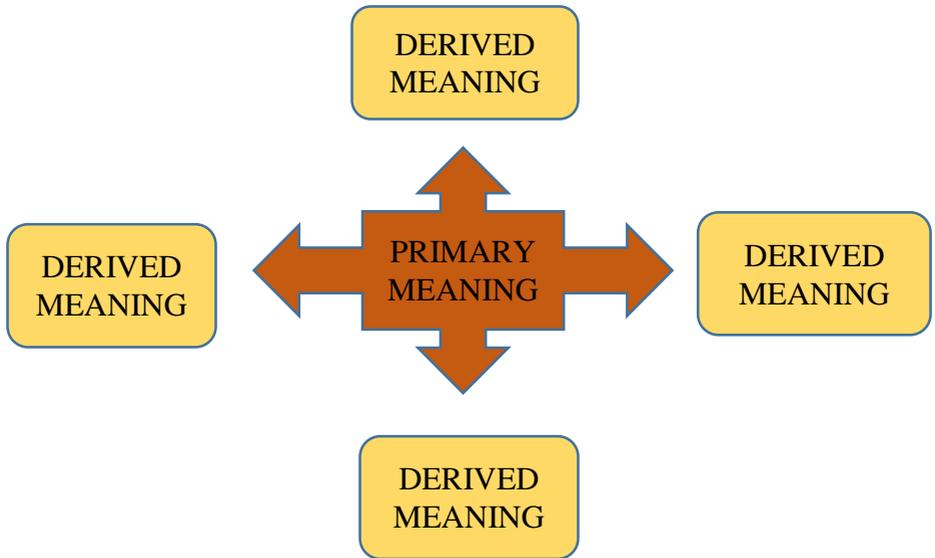
linguists, such as Michel Bréal, who introduced the term "polysemy" in linguistics, see a relationship between the development of language culture and the polysemic enrichment of words. It has been observed that polysemy depends greatly on the frequency of words usage. A special formula known as "Zipf's law" has been developed to express the correlation between frequency, word length and polysemy: the shorter the word, the higher its frequency of use; the higher the frequency, the wider its combinability.

### **Two approaches of polysemy: diachronic and synchronic**

How does a word acquire new meanings? In what way are they related to each other?

If it is viewed *diachronically*, polysemy is understood as the growth and development (or change) in the semantic structure of the word. Polysemy in diachronic term means that a word may along with its original meaning it can get other new ones.

According to this approach, two types of meaning can be pointed out in the semantic structure of a word: the *primary* and the *derived meaning*.



*Figure II.2 Primary and derived meaning*

The word *table* meant "a flat slab of stone or wood", which can be identified back in the Old English period in the word *tabule* from Latin *tabula*. In the course of a diachronic semantic analysis of the same polysemic word we find that all the secondary meanings it has in Modern English derived from the primary meaning. We can get the derived meanings by extension, narrowing, analogy, transfer, etc.

e.g: -**table**-a) a piece of furniture;

b) the persons, seated at a table (to keep the table amused);

- c) the food, put on a table, meals ( to keep a good, poor table. );
- d) a thin flat piece of stone, metal, wood;
- e) slabs of stone;
- f) words cut into them or written on them;
- g) an orderly arrangement of facts, figures, (table of contents) ;
- h) part of machine tool, on which the work is put to be operated on;
- i) a level area, a plateau.

If approached *synchronically*, polysemy is acknowledged as the existence of various meanings of the same word at a certain period of the development of the English vocabulary. In this case the problem of interrelation and interdependence of individual meanings making up the semantic structure of the word must be investigated from different points of view, that of main/ derived, central /peripheric meanings.

There is a trend in modern linguistics to interpret the concept of the central meaning in terms of the frequency of occurrence in speech of this meaning, which became the most important objective criterion of determining the main or central meaning.

Thus, in the course of a synchronic semantic analysis of the word *chair* all its meanings represent the semantic structure of it.

The central place in the semantic structure occupies the

meaning ‘a piece of furniture’. This emerges as the central meaning of the word, and all other meanings are marginal meanings.

The central meaning occurs in various and different contexts, marginal meanings are observed only in certain contexts. The word *chair* in the meaning of ‘a piece of furniture’ makes up the highest percent of all uses of this word.

The notion of polysemy opposes two other notions.

The first one is *monosemia*, meaning the uniqueness of meaning. The term monosemia comes from the Greek *monos* which means alone, unique and semeion that is sign, meaning. The property of monosemia is consequently to have only one meaning.

Indeed, the relationship between the signifier and the signified in the monosemic is univocal. In other words, a signifier has only one signified if it is monosemic. The technical terminology very often has this property, because of its specific singularity. The monosemic terms have only one lexical entry in the dictionary, and a single meaning is attributed to them. Thus, for example, when an individual seeks in the dictionary the term *molecule* or *hydrogen*, he will find only one definition associated with these words, and under a single lexical entry:

e.g. molecule= noun mol·e·cule \`mä-li-kyül\ : the smallest particle of a substance that retains all the properties of the substance and is

composed of one or more atoms, *a molecule of water, a molecule of oxygen*<sup>23</sup>

hydrogen= noun hy·dro·gen \ 'hī-drə-jən, -də- \ : a nonmetallic element that is the simplest and lightest of the elements, is normally a colorless odorless highly flammable diatomic gas, and is used especially in synthesis

Like these two terms, any term that appears only under a single lexical entry, without internal numbering or grouping of meaning, and associated with only one concept, is a monosemic term. Finally, the monosemic terms have only one lexeme, that is to say that they have only one lexical origin, which is absolutely logical in the sense that they have only one meaning assigned to that entry.

The other notion is *homonymy*. The question of whether two words with the same phonetic body are polysemic or homonymic is not always clear. It is not always easy to determine whether a word has several different meanings or only a vague sense. Unlike polysemy, homonymy is not a phenomenon that depends on the internal laws of the evolution of the lexical system, but it is an accidental product, caused by the disturbing action of the phonetic factors, the phenomena of derivation, distinct from explicit.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/molecule>

Lyons considers two alternatives to circumventing the homonymy-polysemy issue:

1. Maximise homonymy -- associate every meaning of a word with a distinct lexeme. Lyons shows that this will lead to considerable redundancy in the lexicon, as much morphological, syntactic, and even semantic information will be repeated in the lexical entries for the distinct lexemes.

However, this redundancy can be greatly reduced given current inheritance-based approaches to lexicon construction. More problematic is the observation that this approach depends on the ability to spell out in advance all of the possible senses in which a word will be used. Lyons suggests that sense distinctions can be "multiplied indefinitely"<sup>24</sup> and that therefore this tack is hopeless.

It will never be possible to decide in advance the full range of possible senses a particular word might be associated with, and furthermore it makes the computational task of selecting the appropriate lexeme daunting given the number of lexemes which might be associated with a particular word form

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<sup>24</sup> Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics*. (2 vols.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.554.

2. Maximise polysemy -- adopt the notion that no two lexemes can be entirely distinct when they are syntactically equivalent and when the set of word forms they are associated with are identical. On this view, there are only various kinds of partial homonymy (i.e. when there exist syntactic differences among uses of a word). This removes the vague concept of "semantic relatedness" from the lexicon.

However, it would result in an extremely underspecified lexicon from which very little information about the meaning of words could be gleaned. It suffers from the problem of an inability to explain the intuitions that underly the notion of homonymy, and, more relevant to computation, from a complete inability to identify the normal context of use of a particular word and no basis for establishing synonym classes or other semantically-based groupings. How any useful interpretation could be accomplished without some sense differentiation is difficult to see.”<sup>25</sup>

## **Sources of polysemy**

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<sup>25</sup> <http://ftp.cogsci.ed.ac.uk/pub/kversp/html/node152.html>

## **A. Affixation**

Linguists use the term affix to mark out where exactly a bound morpheme is connected to a word. Prefixes are attached at the onset of a free morpheme, while suffixes are attached at the end. While in English suffixes can be either derivational or inflectional (*discussing, sooner, baldest* vs *adornment, activate, failure*), prefixes are always derivational (*unable, disobey, enlarge*).

## **B. Conversion**

Another highly efficient word formation process is conversion. The term is used to describe a word class change without any morphological marking.

*e.g. a throw(noun) -> to throw (verb)*

*cool (adjective)-> to cool(verb)*

**C. Shortenings** are produced in two different ways.

a) making a new word from a syllable or two of the original word.

*e.g. fence-> defence*

*hols-> holidays*

*vac -> vacation*

*props-> properties*

*ad*-> *advertisement*

b) making a new word from the initial letters of a word group also called *initial shortening*.

e.g. *U.N.O.*-> *the United Nations Organisation*

*B.B.C.*-> *the British Broadcasting Corporation*.

**D. Clipping** or cutting off two or more syllables of a word.

e.g. doc-doctor

mit-mitten

influenza – flu **CLIPPING** -Consists in the reduction of a word to one of its parts.

**E. Abbreviation** (from Latin *brevis*, meaning short) is a shortened form of a word or phrase.

e.g. *UNESCO*- *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation*

The main source of polysemy is a change in the semantic structure of the word. Semantic changes result as a rule in new meanings being added to the ones already existing in the semantic structure of the word. Some of the old meanings may become outdated or even disappear, but the mass of English words tends to increase in number of meanings.

Linguists have been interested for a long period of time in the polysemy phenomenon because of the demanding problems it brings up for semantic compositionality, theories of semantic representation, language processing and communication

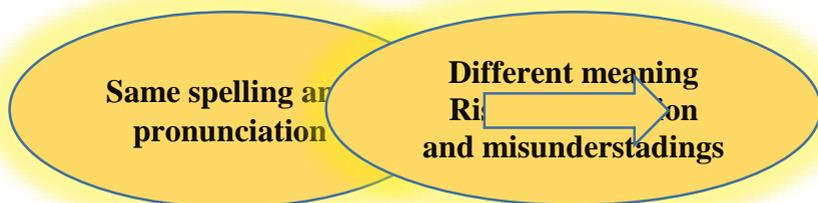
## **II.4.2 Homonymy**

In linguistics, homonymy refers to the relationship of two or more words belonging to the same group or grammatical category that have the same spelling and may or may not have the same pronunciation. They are etymologically and semantically unrelated because they have different meanings and origins. The state of words of being identical or quasi-identical in appearance and pronunciation is called homonymy, and the words in this category are called homonyms.

The word *homonym* comes from the Greek term '*Homoios*' which means *identical* and '*onoma*' which means *name*.

The entry for "homonyms" in the British Encyclopedia (14th Edition) states that "homonyms are words written in the same way, but in a totally different sense and that homonyms are words similar to pronunciation because of the accent." On the other hand, homonyms are defined in the Oxford Dictionary of English (second

edition) as "a word with the same writing as another, but with different origins and meanings."



*Figure II.3 Homonyms*

English vocabulary is very rich in such pairs of words and even groups of words. Their identical forms appeared mostly by accident: the majority of homonyms were identical due to the phonetic changes that happened during their development.

If synonyms and antonyms can be regarded as the treasure of the language's expressive resources, homonyms are of no interest in this regard therefore one cannot expect them to be of particular value for communication. Pairs of antonyms and groups of synonyms are created by the vocabulary system with a particular purpose while homonyms are accidental creations, and in conclusion, purposeless.

In the communication process they are more of an impediment, leading sometimes to confusion and misunderstanding. In isolated spoken sentences, homophonic homonyms can also give rise to lexical ambiguity. For example, in the following sentences

it is almost impossible to know the intended meanings of *bank* and *bear*. Notice the following sentences.

*E.g. John goes to the bank. [bæNk] . =the financial institution or the ground by the river?*

*Mary can't bear [bE'r] children. =have or tolerate?*

Homonyms usually have different entries in dictionaries, often indicated by superscripted little numbers;

*e.g. lie<sup>1</sup> = to rest, be, remain, be situated in a certain position*

*lie<sup>2</sup> = not to tell the truth*

*to bear<sup>1</sup> = to give birth to*

*to bear<sup>2</sup> = to tolerate*

*bank<sup>1</sup> = the ground near a river*

*bank<sup>2</sup> = financial institution*

*lead<sup>1</sup> = the first place or position, an example behavior for others to copy*

*lead<sup>2</sup> = heavy metal*

## Classification of Homonyms

The standard way of classification, given by Walter Skeat, is the most accepted classification of homonyms that is recognizing homonyms proper, homophones and homographs.

I. Homonyms proper or perfect, absolute homonyms are words with identical pronunciation and spelling but with different in meaning: e . g. *bear - animal-The juggler started his number with a bear.*  
*bear -carry, tolerate-She couldn't bear the separation from her children.*

*bear- to procreate-A cat bears kittens.*

*Watch- a wrist watch- I was gifted a watch for my birthday.*

*Watch-to guard-The watch and the ward staff is on duty tonight.*

II. Homophones or heterographs are words that sound identically but which have different spelling and meaning:

e.g. *veil[veil]-cover-We saw a veiled car in the garage.*

*Wail[weyl]-cry-the wails of the little girl made her emotional.*

*Hale[heyl]-healthy-I wish you to be always hale and sound.*

*hail[heyl]-icy storm-The hail prevented us from going out.*

*waste[weyst]-garbage-Please put the waste in the garbage bin.*

*waist[weyst]-part of the body-She always wears a black belt around her waist.*

III. Homographs or heteronyms are words that sound different and have different meaning but accidentally they are identical in spelling: e.g. *scale[skeil]-a weighing instrument-The greengrocer weighed the vegetables in the scale.*

*scale[skäl]-measuring rod-The builder measured the wall with the scale.*

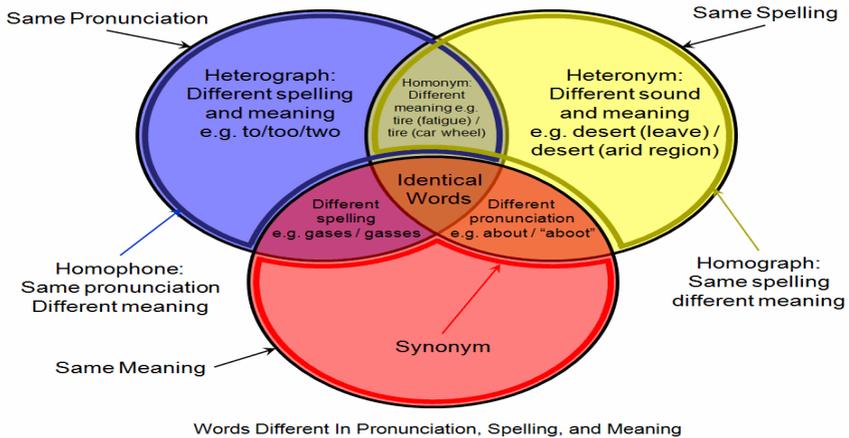
*scale[skeyl]-to climb a mountain-The mountaineers scaled the highest peak.*

*row[roh]-a line-It takes more to make a line.*

*row [rəʊ]-to move a boat- He was rowing the boat carefully.*

*row[rou]-dispute-The opponents raised a row and then left with no warning.*

Also, the form of each word should be considered, because it has been observed that the forms of some homonyms coincide completely, and of others only partially.



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*Table II.4 Venn Diagram showing relations between homophones and related linguistic concepts*

A more detailed classification was developed by I. V. Arnold. She classified only the group of perfect homonyms (according to Skeat's classification) and suggested four criteria of their classification:

*I. Lexical meaning*

*II. Grammatical meaning*

*III. Basic forms*

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<sup>26</sup> <https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homofon>

#### IV. Paradigms

According to these criteria I.V. Arnold pointed out the following groups:

a) homonyms identical in their grammatical meanings, basic form and paradigms and their different lexical meanings, e.g. *board* in the meaning *a council* and *a piece of wood sawn thin*;

b) homonyms identical in their grammatical meanings and basic forms, but different in their lexical meanings and paradigms, e.g. *to lie – lied – lied*, and *to lie – lay – lain*;

c) homonyms different in their lexical meanings, grammatical meanings, paradigms, but coinciding in their basic form, e.g. *light (lights) light (lighter, lighted)*;

d) homonyms different in their lexical meanings, grammatical meanings, in their basic forms and paradigms, but coinciding in one of the forms of their paradigms, e.g. *a bit* and *bit* (Past Simple of *to bite*).

In I. V. Arnold's classification there are also patterned homonyms, which, in contrast other homonyms, have a common component in their lexical meanings. These are homonyms formed either by means of conversion, or by levelling of grammar inflexions. These homonyms are different in their grammatical

meanings, in their paradigms, but identical in their basic forms, e.g. *warm*, *to warm*. Here we can also have unchangeable patterned homonyms which have identical basic forms, different grammatical meanings and a common component in their lexical meanings, e.g. *before* – an adverb, a conjunction, a preposition. There are also homonyms among unchangeable words which are different in their lexical and grammatical meanings, but identical in their basic forms., e.g. *for* – *pro* and *for* – *preposition*.

According to professor A. I. Smirnitsky homonyms are classified into two large classes:

**I. Full lexical homonyms** - are words representing the same category of parts of speech and have the same paradigm.

E. g. *match*, *n.* — *a game, a contest-I watched a beautiful match.*

*match*, *n.* — *a short piece of wood used for producing fire-He didn't have a match to lit the fire.*

*wren*, *n.* — *a member of the Women's Royal Naval Service-Being a WREN is a great honour.*

*wren*, *n.* — *a bird-They heard the wren singing beautifully at the window.*

**II. Partial homonyms are divided into three subgroups:**

A. Simple lexico-grammatical partial homonyms belong to the same group or parts of speech. Their paradigms have just one identical form, but it is never the same form, as will be seen from the examples.

E. g. *to found* (Past Indef.) -*He sent the dogs to found the lost items.*  
*found*, v. (Past Part. of *to find*)-*He found the books at the library.*

*to lay*, v.-*Mom lays the table every day*

*lay*, v. (Past Simple. of *to lie*)-*He lay in bed all day yesterday because he was exhausted.*

*to bound*, v.*The rabbits bound through the meadow. (Present.)*

*bound*, v. (Past Part, of *to bind*)-*He had his hands bound.*

B. Complex lexico-grammatical partial homonyms are words that belong to different categories of parts of speech which have one identical form in their paradigms.

E. g. *rose*, n.-flower-*He offered his beloved one a big bunch of roses.*

*rose*, v. (Past. of *to rise*)-*The sun rose at 6.15 yesterday.*

*maid*, n.-servant-*She called her maid to clean the room.*

*made*, v. (Past.of *to make*)-*The made her a surprise party.*

*left*, adj.-the opposite of right-*British people drive their cars on the left.*

*left*, v. (Past of *to leave*)-*He left without saying good bye.*

C. Partial lexical homonyms are words belonging to the same category of parts of speech which are identical only in their corresponding forms.

E. g. *to lie (lay, lain)*-v. *to lie (lied, lied)*, v.

*to hang (hung, hung)*, v.-*to hang (hanged, hanged)*, v.

From the point of view of their origin homonyms are sometimes divided into historical and etymological:

I. Historical homonyms are those which result from the breaking up of polysemy; then one polysemantic word will split up into two or more separate words

II. Etymological homonyms are words of different origin which come to be alike in sound or in spelling (and may be both written and pronounced alike).

Borrowed and native words can coincide in form, thus producing homonyms (as in the above given examples).

### **Sources of homonymy**

*Phonetic changes* are one source of homonymy. Words undergo various fonetic changes in the course of their historical development. As a result of these changes, two or more words which used to be pronounced differently in the past might develop identical

sound forms and thus become homonyms as in the example: *Night* and *knicht*. In Old English, these two words were not homonyms as the initial *k* in the second word was pronounced, and not dropped as it is in its modern sound form: O. E. *kniht* (cf. O. E. *niht*). An even more complex change of form joined another pair of homonyms: *to knead* (O. E. *cnedan*) and *to need* (O. E. *neodian*). Furthermore in Old English the verb *to write* had the form *writan*, and the adjective *right* had the forms *reht*, *riht*, the noun *sea* comes from the Old English form *sǣ*, and the verb *to see* from O. E. *sēon*. The verb *to work* and the noun *work* also had different forms in Old English: *weork* and *wyrkean*.

Another source of homonyms is the *borrowing* is. A borrowed word, in the last stage of its phonetic evolution, can duplicate in form either a native word or another borrowed word.

Thus, in the group of homonyms *rite*, n. — *to write*, v. — *right*, adj. the second and third words are of native origin whereas *rite* is a Latin borrowing (< Lat. *ritus*). In the *pair piece*, n. — *peace*, n., the first has its origins in O. F. *pais*, and the second in O. F. (< Gaulish) *pettia*. *Bank*, n. ("shore") is a native word, and *bank*, n. ("a financial institution") has Italian origins. *Fair*, adj. (as in *a fair deal*, *it's not fair*) is native, and *fair*, a. ("a gathering of buyers and sellers") comes from France. *Match*, n. ("a game; a contest of skill, strength")

is native, and *match*, n. ("a slender short piece of wood used for producing fire") originates from France.

*Word-bulding* is another source that contributes significantly to the growth of homonymy is. The most important type in this respect is undoubtedly *conversion*. Pairs of words such as *drink*, n. — *to drink*, v., *shop*, n. — *to shop*, v., *to sleep*, v. — *sleep*, n. are often met in the vocabulary. This type of homonyms, which are the same in sound and spelling but refer to different categories of parts of speech, are called *lexico-grammatical homonyms*.

### **Problems of homonymy**

It should be noted that the most debatable problem in homonymy is the demarcation line between homonymy and polysemy, i.e. between various meanings of one word and the meanings of two or more homonymous words.

In traditional approaches of semantics represented by Ullmann 1962,, Weinreich 1963, 1966, Leech 1987, 1974, Lyons 1987, 1977, 1995 and Lipka 1990, homonymy is usually discussed in conjunction with polysemy. If two lexical items have either 1) etymologically distinct meanings or 2) semantically unrelated meanings, they are regarded as homonyms. In contrast, if the

meanings concerned are metaphorical or metonymic extension , they are considered to be one single lexeme with two senses.<sup>27</sup>

Ullmann (1962) has proposed two criteria for distinguishing homonymy and polysemy:”etymology and spelling”.”A language without polysemy is impossible to imagine and a language without homonymy is not only conceivable, it would be, in fact , a more efficient medium.”<sup>28</sup>

### II.4.3 Synonymy

**Word origin:** Greek  *syn* = with, *ónoma* = name

‘Synonymy’ as a type of paradigmatic relations, i.e. relations that “reflect the semantic choices available at a particular structure point in a sentence”<sup>29</sup> and is usually defined as the ”sameness or of

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<sup>27</sup> Neagu, M. 2015.*Fundamentals of Semantics and Pragmatics*. (co-author Claudia Pisoschi), Craiova: Universitaria, p.53.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.27.

<sup>29</sup> Cruse, A. 2000. *Meaning in Language*. Oxford: OUP, p.148.

meaning”. Linguistic studies, however, indicate that ‘synonymy’ is not such a simple and plain notion as this definition suggests.

Synonymy is an important feature of the vocabulary of any language and, in the same time, one of the most controversial issues of modern linguistics.. It is very difficult to give a genuine definition of this pragmatic relation between two or more items.

There are various approaches with numerous definitions of synonymy and types of synonyms. Technically, it takes place when multiple linguistic forms are used to substitute one another in speech or in writing and as a result the conveyed meaning doesn’t change. Practically, synonymous words convey the same meaning if taken separately but they can not be substituted in any context. It is to be mentioned here that synonyms do not always mean the ‘sameness of meaning’ as there are no two elements that can be used with the same statistic probability in absolutely all contexts with completely identical meaning.

In his interpretation of synonymy, Bolinger (1968) specifies the term ‘semantic range’.By this he understands the series of potential meanings that a word may have. He says that synonyms are words whose ranges overlap so considerably as to become almost identical, and adds that “for synonyms to be of practical interest there

must be some expectation of their being substituted for each other”<sup>30</sup>  
This replaceability is to be found under two sets of conditions: the first is a matter of precision, of saying exactly what one intends to point out, and the second is a matter of contrast, of saying something that sounds different. Bolinger ends his investigation by asserting that no two words have exactly the same range of meanings, and therefore, “there is no such a thing as an ideal synonym”<sup>31</sup>

Cruse embraces Bolinger’s point of view and asserts that “synonyms are words whose semantic similarities are more salient than their differences”<sup>32</sup>. In other words, it means that synonyms are those lexical units whose meanings are similar in respect of central semantic traits, but can be distinct in respect of minor or peripheral features. He sustains his allegation by two examples: while while *truthful* and *honest* manifest a significant degree of semantic convergence and can thus, be called synonyms. *Alsation* and *spaniel* are related too, but are not regarded as synonyms, the traits which

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<sup>30</sup> Bolinger, D. 1968. *Aspects of Language*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, p.233. <sup>30</sup> <https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homofon>

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 30. p.234.

<sup>32</sup> Cruse, A. 2000. *Meaning in Language*. Oxford: OUP, p.156.

distinguish one from the other surpassing those which the two items have in common<sup>33</sup>.

Moreover, Cruse introduces another valid rule for synonymy: “denying one member of a pair of synonyms implicitly denies the other, too”<sup>34</sup>, which is not the case of the pair *alsation – spaniel*. Synonyms also occur together in certain types of expression. For instance, they are often used as an explanation, or clarification, of the meaning of another word. When synonyms are used contrastively, the difference is pointed out by some such expression as more exactly, *or* or *rather*.

Frawley (1992) describes synonymy in terms of truth conditions. According to him, “synonyms are words that can be substituted for each other in an expression without affecting the truth value”<sup>35</sup>. Thus, it is possible to replace the word *couch* by the word *sofa* in the sentence “I bought a \_” only because the truth conditions in both sentences are the same.

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<sup>33</sup> Cruse, D. A. 1985. *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge: CUP.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 33, p.266-267.

<sup>35</sup> Frawley, W. 1992. *Linguistic Semantics*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum, p.28.

Lyons makes a stricter and a wider interpretation of the term ‘synonymy’<sup>36</sup>. According to his stricter interpretation, two lexical items are considered synonymous if they have the same sense. The wider sense of synonymy, which is also recognized by Palmer, is “the kind of synonymy that is exploited by the dictionary-maker”<sup>37</sup>. To illustrate his point of view, Lyons gives examples of possible synonyms for the word *nice*: *savoury*, *discriminative*, *exact*, *good*, *pleasing*, *fastidious* and *honourable*, and says that since each of these words has a different shade of meaning, and can replace *nice* only in one particular context, it is synonymous to *nice* under the looser interpretation of the notion of synonymy.

However, before continuing with the theory of synonymy, as it is considered to be “sameness of meaning” of different expressions, it is important, to clarify what ‘sameness’ involves and what ‘meaning’ involves.

Harris believes that there are at least four different kinds of ‘sameness’<sup>38</sup>:

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<sup>36</sup> Lyons, J. 1968. *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge: CUP. p.446.

<sup>37</sup> Palmer, F. R. 1986. *Semantics*. Cambridge: CUP. p 91.

<sup>38</sup> Harris, R. 1973. *Synonymy and Linguistic Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. p.11.

a) *'type-1 sameness'* – the word 'same' is used "in connexion with various parts of the history of one continuous thing"<sup>39</sup> for example, it doesn't matter what position an object is moved to it is still regarded as the same object:

b) *'type - 2 sameness'* – there are "two or more instances of non-continuous things, as when we talk about 'the same dance step' or 'the same experiment', alluding to a repetition of previous actions"<sup>40</sup>

c) *'type - 3 sameness'* – two or more coexistent copies of one thing are recognized the same, e.g. 'the same book'

d) *'type - 4 sameness'* – "at least two continuous things are the same in a given respect"<sup>41</sup>, for example, when someone is told to have 'the same hair' as their mother

In conclusion of his discourse on 'sameness', Harris claims that if two expressions have the same meaning, then they are the same according to the 'type-4 sameness'.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.38.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.38.

<sup>41</sup> Harris, R. 1973.*Synonymy and Linguistic Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. p.11.

Leech breaks down the meaning into seven different categories:<sup>42</sup>

1) '*conceptual*' meaning (also called 'denotative' or 'cognitive' meaning)

According to Leech, conceptual meaning is the central factor in linguistic communication. It is the basic meaning of a word organized in agreement with two structural principles which form the basis of all linguistic patterning: the principle of contrastiveness (whether the meaning of a word possesses or not certain features) and the principle of structure (according to which larger linguistic units are built up out of smaller units).

2) '*connotative*' meaning

In contrast with conceptual meaning and regarded as peripheral compared to it, due to its open-ended and indeterminate character "connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content"<sup>43</sup>

3) '*social*' meaning

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<sup>42</sup> Leech, G. 1981. *Semantics: The Study of Meaning*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. p.9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.42. p.12.

“Social meaning is that which a piece of language conveys about the social circumstances of its use”<sup>44</sup>. The reader is able to understand the social meaning of a text through his or her recognition of different dimensions and levels of style within the same language. There are to be found several dimensions of socio-stylistic variation, for example: variation due to dialect (e.g. the language of specific regions or social status), time (e.g. the language of the 18th century), jurisdiction (e.g. the language of law), status (e.g. polite, colloquial language), modality (e.g. the language of memoranda) and uniqueness (e.g. the style of Dickens). Leech’s observation that hardly any words have both the same conceptual and the same social meaning implies the non-existence of true synonymy, and leads to the conclusion that ‘synonymy’ should be restricted to equivalence of one of these two meanings; and as it is conceptual meaning which is considered to be the focal centre of understanding, Leech chooses this very meaning to constitute the basis for the definition of synonymy.

#### 4) ‘*affective*’ meaning

It deals with feelings and attitudes. Through language the speaker reflects personal feelings and attitudes. Leech considers

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.42, p14.

affective meaning to be a parasitic category because it is mainly transmitted through the connotative and conceptual content of the words used that this meaning can be communicated. Other factors, such as intonation and voice-timbre, are also important.

5) *'reflected'* meaning

“Reflected meaning is the meaning which arises in cases of multiple conceptual meaning, when one sense of a word forms part of our response to another sense”<sup>45</sup>. Leech exemplifies this point by synonymous expressions *The Comforter* – *The Holy Ghost* and says that “*The Comforter* sounds warm and comforting, while *The Holy Ghost* sounds awesome”<sup>46</sup>

6) *'collocative'* meaning

It is the sense a word acquires in association with words which tend to occur in its environment. This can be exemplified by the pair of adjectives *small* and *little* which, despite their shared basic meaning, are distinguished by the nouns with which they collocate.

7) *'thematic'* meaning

The way the message is organized by the speaker or writer determines the seventh type of meaning, called ‘thematic’

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<sup>45</sup> Leech, G. 1981. *Semantics: The Study of Meaning*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. p. 16

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 45.p.16

meaning. It deals with functional sentence perspective and the effect a sentence has on the listener or speaker. It is influenced by the choice between alternative grammatical constructions (e.g. the passive equivalent of an active sentence)

Different classifications of meaning have been made by other authors. Hladký and Růžička adopted Leech's classification in their study, but they use the terms 'semantic nucleus' for Leech's conceptual meaning and 'semantic environment' for all the other six types of meaning, (1998: 20). They also differ from Leech in using an alternative name for 'social' meaning to which they refer as 'stylistic' meaning.

Lyons points out the distinction between 'descriptive' or 'propositional' and 'non-descriptive' or 'non-propositional'<sup>47</sup> meaning. He states that descriptive meaning is the meaning carried by descriptive statements, which are true or false according to whether the propositions that they express are true or false. Non-descriptive meaning is more heterogeneous and includes an 'expressive' component. He also talks about 'lexical' and 'grammatical' meaning: "Different forms of the same lexeme will

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<sup>47</sup> Lyons, J. 1995. *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: CUP. p.44.

generally, though not necessarily, differ in meaning: they will share the same lexical, but differ in respect of their grammatical meaning”<sup>48</sup>. While lexical items have both lexical and grammatical meaning, grammatical items contain only grammatical meaning.

There are three types of grammatical meaning:

- a) the morphological meaning
- b) the meaning of the minor parts of speech (e.g. subject-of)
- c) the meaning associated with sentence types

Alexander thinks that the communicative process has four distinct phases or senses of meaning:<sup>49</sup>

- 1) ‘intentional’ meaning – the meaning in the mind of the speaker when he is framing his message
- 2) ‘content’ meaning – the meaning of the message that the speaker intends to communicate, and is further subdivided into ‘conceptual’, ‘emotive’ and ‘active’ meaning
- 3) ‘significative’ meaning – it is the meaning of the signs and symbols (including language) that the speaker or writer uses
- 4) ‘interpreted’ meaning – it is the meaning conveyed to the mind of the listener when he receives the message

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.47, p. 52

<sup>49</sup> Alexander, H. G. 1969.*Meaning in Language*. Glenview: Scott, Foreman & Comp. p.1-13.

According to Leech, hardly any words have both the same conceptual and the same stylistic meaning.<sup>50</sup> This observation has frequently led linguists to declare that true synonyms do not exist.

If synonymy is seen as complete equivalence of communicative effect, it is difficult to find an example that could disprove this statement. It is, therefore, necessary to restrict the term 'synonymy' to equivalence of one of the meanings mentioned. Since conceptual (cognitive) meaning is defined as the focal centre of understanding, many semanticists have based the criterion for selecting synonyms upon it.

Lyons mentions two kinds of synonymy: 'cognitive',<sup>51</sup> (later he introduces the term 'descriptive synonymy'<sup>52</sup> for this type of synonymy; and 'non-cognitive',<sup>53</sup> and claims that the distinction between them is drawn in various ways by different authors.

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<sup>50</sup> Leech, G. 1981. *Semantics: The Study of Meaning*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. p.14.

<sup>51</sup> Lyons, J. 1968. *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*. Cambridge: CUP. p.449.

<sup>52</sup> Lyons, J. 1995. *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: CUP. p.63.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 52

Nevertheless, “in all cases it is cognitive synonymy which is defined the first (and) no one ever talks of words as being emotively but not cognitively synonymous”<sup>54</sup>

## **Classifications of synonyms**

There are various studies on synonyms in linguistics mainly based on their use in context, as synonymy is always related to context. Synonyms are somewhat the same and yet they are clearly different. Their function in speech is revealing different aspects, shades and variations of the same phenomenon. The synonyms chosen to be used must be accurate and meet the requirements of the literary and correct speech.

Most synonymic groups have a central word whose meaning is equal denotation common to all the synonymic groups which is called the dominant synonym.

e.g. to produce – to create – to fabricate – to make – to manufacture.

The dominant synonym has the following characteristic features:

1. frequent use;

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.52

2. Extensive combinability (ability to be used in combination with various classes of words);
3. extensive general meaning;
4. lack of connotation.

The process of using synonyms will never be perfect because many words in English are used in many different ways as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. Also many words have various meanings in different contexts. The alternative words are often inappropriate and make no sense in the context of the phrase.

For true synonymy to exist, the pair of words must be identical in meaning when they are transposed into the same sentence. But most of the time this is not possible because of the dual meanings of some words.

“Within the class of synonyms [...], some pairs of items are more synonymous than others, and this raises the possibility of a scale of synonymy of some kind”<sup>55</sup>.

J. Lyons suggests three approaches to synonymy:

A. **Absolute synonyms** which should be *fully*, *totally* and *completely* synonymous.

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<sup>55</sup> Cruse, D. A. 1985. *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge: CUP, p. 267-268

a) synonyms are fully synonymous if, and only if, *all their meanings are identical* ;

b) synonyms are totally synonyms if and only if they are synonymous *in all contexts*;

c) synonyms are completely synonymous if and only if they are *identical on all relevant dimensions of meaning*.

He introduces the term of absolute synonymy as very rare and even hardly existing in language as absolute synonyms are synonymous in all contexts without any exception. “Lexemes can be said to be *completely synonymous* in a certain range of contexts only if they have the same descriptive, expressive and social meaning in the range of contexts in questions. They may be described as *absolutely synonymous* if they have the same distribution and are completely synonymous in all their meanings and in all their contexts of occurrence”<sup>56</sup>. As far as absolute synonymy, as Lyons defines it, it is almost non-existent, and appears only in highly specialized and purely descriptive vocabulary.

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<sup>56</sup> Lyons, J. 1981. *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: CUP, p.148.

On the other hand, complete synonymy is to be found more often. As an example, Lyons considers the adjectives *broad* and *wide* which in the following context „They painted *a wide/broad* stripe right across the wall”, do not unveil any difference in meaning.

It is generally accepted that absolute synonyms are rare in natural language. There are few instances of synonyms that can be replaced in every context. For example, “snake” and “serpent” can be interchanged in many contexts without altering truth values, but not in the statement, “The plumber used a snake to unclog the drain.”(ON KNOWING A WORD-George A. Miller).

**B. Partial synonyms** are those which don't satisfy all the three criteria above, but they should satisfy at least one criterion.

According to Lyons, partial synonyms are those lexical items which meet the criterion of identity of meaning but which fail to satisfy the conditions of absolute synonymy. So, it follows that Lyons' term ‘partial synonymy’ corresponds to cognitive synonymy. As there are no two lexemes with absolutely the same meaning and no real synonyms, cognitive synonymy is what most semanticists would regard as synonymy. Lyons (1996:63) points out that many theories of semantics restrict the notion of synonymy descriptive or cognitive synonymy as he calls it, which is the identity of descriptive meaning.

C. The third group of synonyms is called **near-synonyms**.

Lyons defines near-synonyms as “expressions that are more or less similar, but not identical in meaning”<sup>57</sup> such as *stream* and *brook*. Near-synonymy is usually found in dictionaries of synonyms listed under a single dictionary entry and are not considered to be cognitive synonyms (e.g. *govern* - *direct*, *control*, *determine*, *require*).

Near-synonyms are lexemes whose meaning is relatively close or more or less similar (*mist/fog*, *stream/brook*, *dive/plunge*).

However, the definition of near-synonymy is loose, because there isn't an accurate correlation between synonymy and semantic similarity. It is associated with overlapping of meaning and senses.

The senses of near-synonyms overlap to a great degree, but not completely.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, unlike cognitive synonyms, near-synonyms can contrast in certain contexts:

*He was killed, but I can assure you he was NOT murdered, madam.*<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Lyons, J. 1995. *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction*. Cambridge: CUP, p.60.

<sup>58</sup> Murphy, M. L. 2003. *Semantic Relations and the Lexicon*. Cambridge: CUP, p.155.

<sup>59</sup> Cruse, D. A. 2000. *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. Oxford: OUP. p.159.

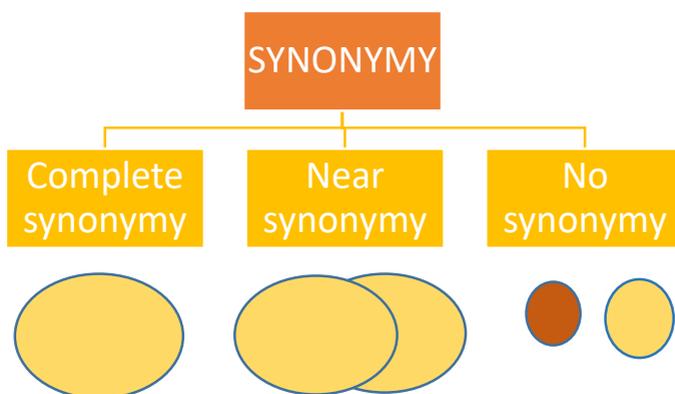


Figure II.5 Types of synonymy

Since “there is no obvious motivation for the existence of absolute synonyms in a language”<sup>60</sup>, very few lexical items, if any, comply with all the three conditions. Ullmann asserts that only few words are interchangeable in any context without any change in meaning. He, however, claims that it is occasionally possible to encounter such words. To exemplify his point of view, he mentions the adverbs *almost* and *nearly* which seem to meet the severe requirements of complete synonymy.

F.Palmer sorts synonyms into five classes:<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Cruse, D. A. 1985. *Lexical Semantics*. Cambridge: CUP. p.270.

<sup>61</sup> Palmer, F. R. 1986 *Semantics*. Cambridge: CUP. p.89.

- Some synonyms belong to different dialects of the language. For instance, the word *fall* is used in the United States and *autumn* is used in Britain.
- Some synonyms are used in different styles according to the degree of formality as colloquial, formal - *gentleman* (formal), *man, chap* (informal).
- Some words differ only in their emotive or evaluative values but their cognitive meaning is the same - *hide, conceal*.
- Some words are subject to collocational restraints as they occur only with specific words - *rancid* occurs with *butter, addled* with *eggs*.
- The meanings of some words overlap - *mature, adult, ripe*

If we examine words according to these ways we will have a larger set of synonyms.

Theoretically, one of the most well-known classification systems for synonyms was established by V.Vinogradov where he distinguishes three types of synonyms:<sup>62</sup>

1.*Ideographic* which are words conveying the same concept but different in the shades of meaning.

2.*Stylistic* which are words different in stylistic characteristics.

3.*Absolute* are called those synonyms which once coincide in all their shades of meaning and in all their stylistic characteristics

In order to consider two words synonymous they have to be identical and share all essential components and capable of being used to substitute one another in all contexts without any noticeable difference in their meanings. This kind of synonymy does not exist. As was mentioned above, synonyms are words having similar meaning. Similarly two phrases or sentences are synonymous when they mean the same. The usual criterion is that meaning is preserved when they are substituted one for the other.

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<sup>62</sup> Vinogradov V.V. Abbreviations from selected works //Language and style of Russian writers.Moscow:Nauka, 2003 available online <http://www.y-su.am/files/ON-SOME-ISSUES-OF-SYNONYMY.pdf>

A more modern approach to the classification of synonyms may be based on the definition of synonyms as words differing in connotations:

1. the connotation of degree or intensity.

e.g.: To surprise- to astonish – to amaze – to astound

To like – to admire – to love – to adore – to worship

2. the connotation of duration.

e.g.: To stare – to glare – to gaze – to glance – to peep – to peer

3. the emotive connotation.

e.g.: alone – single – lonely – solitary

4. the evaluative connotation conveys the speaker's attitude labeling it as good or bad:

e.g. well-known – famous – notorious –celebrated

5. the causative connotation:

e.g. to sparkle– to glitter

to shiver (with cold, from a chill, because of a frost) –  
to shudder (with fear).

6. the connotation of manner:

e.g. to stroll – to stride – to trot – to pace – to swagger – to stagger.

All these synonyms denote different ways and types of walking encoded in their semantic structure: the length of space, tempo, gait, carriage, purposefulness or lack of purpose.

7. the connotation of attendant circumstances.

e.g. To peep smb. – through a hole, from behind a screen, a half-closed door, a newspaper, a fan, a curtain.

8. the connotation of attendant features.

e.g. pretty – handsome – beautiful.

9. stylistic connotation.

e.g. to leave – to be off – to clear out(col.) – to beat it – to hoof it – to take the air (col.) – to depart – to retire – to withdraw (formal).

### **Sources of synonyms**

1)A very important source of synonyms in English is the borrowing from other languages.

Borrowing is the most powerful and significant source of synonymy in English words. English is rich in synonymic pairs and groups which consist of words that can be traced to different languages such as Latin, Greek, French, Scandinavian.

*e.g. work (native) – labour (French)*

*to rise – to mount (French) – to ascend (Latin)*

*to ask (native) – to question (French) – to interrogate (Latin)*

*to end (native) – to finish (French) – to complete (Latin).*

2) Borrowings from different dialects and variants of the English language. Especially large is the group of American synonyms:

*e.g. underground – subway,*

*flat – apartment*

*money – buck*

*autumn – fall.*

3) Semantic changes in English words or semantic shift is the evolution of word usage.

Usually the modern meaning is radically different from the original usage. Every word has a variety of senses and connotations, which can be added, removed, or altered over time, often to the extent that

roots or cognates, across space and time, have very different meanings.

4) Various ways and means of word-building are other sources of synonymy: affixation, prefixation, suffixation, conversion, compounding, clipping, etc.

*e.g. righteous – rightful*

*trader – tradesman*

*doctor – doc*

*laboratory – lab.*

5) Euphemism, generally innocuous word or expression used in place of one that may be found offensive or suggest something unpleasant. Some euphemisms are intended to amuse; while others use gentle, inoffensive terms order to make a blunt or unpleasant truth seem less harsh.

*e.g. passed or departed away instead of died*

*correctional facility instead of jail*

*differently-abled instead of handicapped or disabled*

*fell off the back of a truck instead of stolen*

*ethnic cleansing instead of genocide*

*collateral damage instead of accidental deaths*

*on the streets instead of homeless*

This chapter seeks to examine this sense relation more thoroughly, and provide various insights on ‘synonymy’ as understood by different semanticists as synonymy is one of the most controversial issues of modern linguistics. It plays a vital role in the field of lexical study. It paves the way for proper context building in any natural language. Synonyms cover a large amount of lexical words comprising the grammatical categories, such as noun, verb, adverb, adjectives.

#### II.4.4 Antonyms

**Word origin:** Greek  *anti* = opposite, *ónoma* = name

Antonymy or oppositeness of meaning has long been considered one of the most important semantic relations .

Antonyms come in different forms in linguistic communication. They share an important part of meaning at the same time as they differ conspicuously along the same dimension.

On the one hand, antonyms may be used for poetic impact or purposes of authenticity:

e.g. ‘The most beautiful things are those that madness prompts and reason writes.’ (André Gide),

‘Timid men prefer the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of liberty.’ (Thomas Jefferson)

‘A joke is a very serious thing.’ (Winston Churchill).

On the other hand, it shows up as stylized antonym pairs such as good–bad, heavy–light, hot–cold and slow–fast.

In between those two extremes, there are numerous matchings which language users don’t consider them to be good pairings, e.g. ‘I prefer calm dogs to high-strung dogs’, ‘I prefer calm waters to flowing waters’, ‘I prefer a calm public to an agitated public’ and ‘I prefer calm conversation to flame warring’<sup>63</sup>, where the various different antonyms of calm are more clearly bound up with highly specific domains and situations.

Antonymous pairs of words belong to the same grammatical category sharing almost all their semantic features except one. The semantic feature that they do not share is present in one member of the pair and absent in the other.

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<sup>63</sup> Paradis, C.2005. *Ontologies and construal in lexical semantics*. Axiomathes, p.541-573.

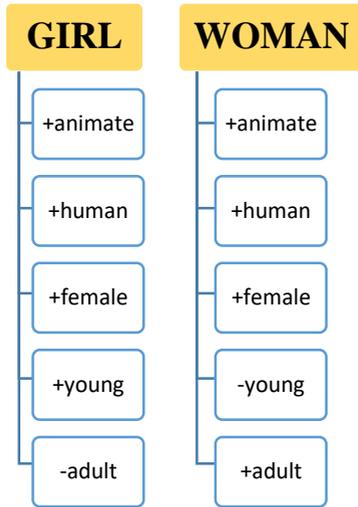


Figure II.6 Antonyms

**Antonyms** have been divided in three major classes:

*1. Gradable or scalar antonyms*

These antonyms refer to pairs of words that are opposite with respect to their degree of possession of a certain semantic property. With gradable pairs the negative of one word is not synonymous with the other. For example, someone who is *not tall* is not necessarily *short*. It is also true for gradable antonyms that more of one is less of another. More bigness is less smallness; wider is less narrow, and taller is less short.

Each term represents or stands for an *end-point* (or extreme) on a scale (e.g., of age, size, weight, beauty, etc.); between those these points, there are other intermediate points.

E.g.: *hot-warm-cool-cold*,  
*big-medium-small*,  
*good-acceptable-satisfactory-bad*,  
*strong-feeble-unable-weak*,  
*beautiful-attractive-disagreeable-ugly*

Words with different degrees can be inserted between the two ends of the scalar antonymy to show the hierarchy of the semantic relativity.

This type of semantic field is characterised by two features, semantic polarity and semantic relativity. These features indicate that the semantic polarity only exists on the base of the semantic relativity. We might say:

E.g. *A person may be rich or very rich.*  
*One person may be richer than another.*

On the other hand, semantic relativity is gradual, that means words with different degrees can be inserted between the two ends of the scalar antonymy to show the hierarchy of the semantic relativity. For example, between *good* and *bad*, we can intercalate *appalling*, *satisfactory*, *terrible* and *fair*.

Gradable antonymy has three main characteristics: first, as the name suggests, they are gradable, that is, the words of a pair differ in terms of degree; second, antonyms of this kind are graded against different norms; third, usually the term for the higher degree, serves as the cover term or one is **marked** and the other **unmarked**. The unmarked member is used in questions of degree.

E.g. *'How old is it?'* and not *'How young is it?'*  
*'How tall is she?'* and not *'How short is she?'*

We answer 'Three hundred meters high' or 'one and a half meters tall' but never 'One and a half meters short', except when we want to be humorous. *High* and *tall* are the unmarked members of *old/young* and *tall/short*. The words themselves provide no information about absolute size, so that the meanings of these adjectives and not only these are relative. But due to our knowledge of the language, and of things in the world, this relativity doesn't cause any confusion. Thus we know that 'a small elephant' is much bigger than 'a big mouse'. is it?

## 2. *Complementary or contradictory antonyms.*

Complementary antonyms are the next category. They refer to couples of words in which one member has a certain semantic feature that the other member doesn't.

E.g. *awake-asleep*

*married-single*

*pass-fail*

*alive-dead*

*male-female*

Hence, in the context, the semantic field is formed by words with interdependent senses in which one member is true, the other member has the opposite significance. It is said that these pairs of antonyms display an *either/or* kind of contrast in which there is ***no middle ground***.

Complementary antonyms also have three characteristics: first, they divide up the whole of a semantic field completely; second, the norm in this type is absolute; third, there is no cover term for the two members of a pair. The complementary antonyms share a semantic field.

In conclusion, *complementarity* antonyms have a type of antonymic relation based on binary oppositions. They are two-term sets of incompatible terms, which do not allow for gradations to be inserted between the extreme poles of a semantic axis. Validity of one term implies denial of the other.

### 3. *Transpositional or relational antonyms*

In these pairs of words the presence of a certain semantic feature in one member implies the presence of another semantic feature in the other member or the existence of one of the members implies the existence of the other member.

E.g. *under-over*

*buy-sell*

*patient-doctor*

*pupil-teacher*

*employee-employer*

The opposite makes sense only in the context of the relationship between the two meanings. There is no lexical opposite of *teacher*, but *teacher* and *pupil* are opposite within the context of their relationship, thus, we can call them relational antonyms.

The pair of words share opposed and in the same time dependent meanings. The two words combine into an opposed unit which exists based on each other's existence.

The division of these three classes are based on the morphological relation between words and the words meanings.

Antonyms may be **morphologically related**, that is, one of the members of the antonymic pair is derived from the other member by the addition of a negative word or an affix

E.g. *good-not good*

*friendly-unfriendly*

*likely-unlikely*

They also can be **morphologically unrelated**, that is to say, one of the elements of the pair does not derive from the other

E.g. *good-bad*

*high-low*

Morphologically related antonyms can be formed by:

a) using the word *not*;

E.g., *alive-not alive*

*happy-not happy*

*beautiful-not beautiful.*

b) adding negative prefixes such as *un-*, *im-*, *in-*, *il-*, *ir-*, *non-*, *mis-*, *dis-*, *a-*.

E.g. *happy-unhappy*

*do-undo*

*lock-unlock*

*entity-nonentity*

*conformist-nonconformist*

*tolerant-intolerant*

*decent-indecent*

*please-displease*

*like-dislike*

*behave-mishave*

*hear-mishear*

*moral-amoral*

*political-apolitical*

*legal-illegal*

c) adding negative suffixes such as *-less*.

E.g. *careful-careless*  
*joyful-joyless*.

## II.4.5. Hyponymy

**Word origin:** Greek  *hupó* =under, *ónoma* = name

‘Hyponymy’ is one of the fundamental structuring principles in the vocabulary of a language, often referred to as ‘meaning inclusion’. It can also be defined “in terms of ‘entailment’ between sentences which differ only in respect of the lexical items being tested”<sup>64</sup>

That is to say, room is a ‘hyponym’ of house, and conversely, house is a ‘superordinate’ of room.

A hyponym is another word used when talking about the way the words relate. It is used to designate a particular member of a broader class called a subtype or a subordinate term. For instance, *bear* and *horse* are hyponyms of *animal*.

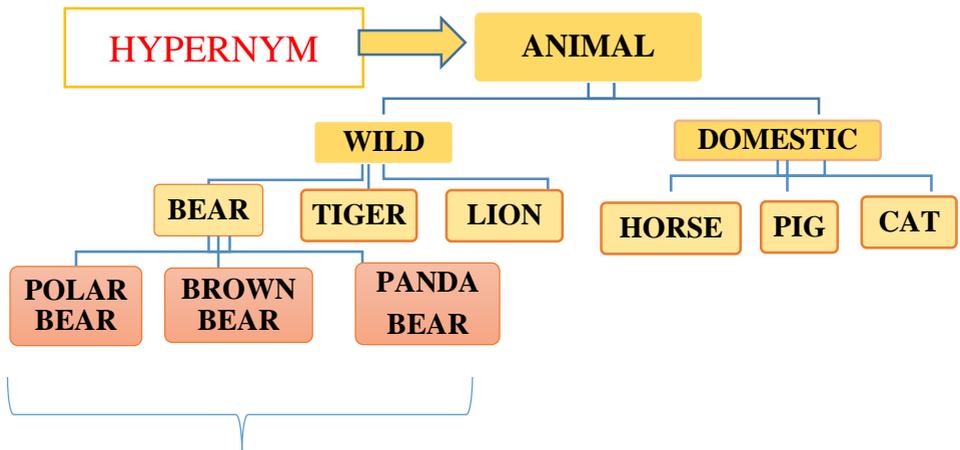
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<sup>64</sup> Cruse, D. A. 2000. *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. New York: OUP. p. 151.

Words that are hyponyms of the same broader term are called *co-hyponyms*. The semantic relationship between each of the more specific words, such as *bear* and *horse* and the broader term, *animal* is called *hyponymy*, the most common branch of semantic field theory.

Hyponymy or is the semantic relationship that exists between two or more words in which the meaning of other words is included by the meaning of one single word. Thus, the term whose meaning is included in the meaning of the other term(s) is the general term; linguists refer to it as a superordinate or hypernym. The term whose meaning includes the meaning of the other term is the specific term; linguists refer to it as a hyponym.

If several other specific words share the meaning of a superordinate term, the set of specific terms which are hyponyms of the same superordinate term and are called **co-hyponyms**. So hyponymy can be multileveled, which means the basic level could be divided into more specific levels, and even more specific ones. For example:



## CO-HYPONYMS

*Figure II.7 Hyponyms*

Co-hyponyms share the same ranking in the hierarchy: bear, horse, tiger but bear has also a superordinate relation to polar bear, brown bear, panda bear and a subordinate relation to animal which is the superordinate term. It implies as a rule multiple taxonomies, a series of hypo-ordinate / subordinate terms being included in the area of a hyper-ordinate / super-ordinate term. If one componential formula contains all the features present in the other formula the relationship exists between two meanings

We could divide animals into wild and domestic, and wild could be further divided into bear, tiger, lion and domestic into horse, pig, cat, etc. And the bears could also be divided into polar bear, brown bear and panda bear and so on. These sections implicate the system of hyponymy, which is basically the superordinate-hyponym semantic field, also called general terms and specific terms.

A super ordinate word can have many hyponyms. Hyponymy is the semantic relationship between a lower term and a higher term. It is a sense relation which is defined in terms of the inclusion of the sense of one item in the sense of another.

E.g. The sense of purple is included in the sense of colour.

Hyponymy can be seen in many other levels of the lexicon not exclusively related to objects, abstract concepts or nouns mentioned above. The verb to *give*, for example, has a number of hyponyms—*donate*, *award*, *hand in*, and so on. Edward Finnegan stresses that although "hyponymy is found in all languages, the concepts that have words in hyponymic relationships vary from one language to the next"<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Finnegan, E. 2008. *Language: Its Structure and Use*, Seventh Edition, USA. Cengage Learning. p. 198.

Hyponymy implies the logical relationship of deduction or entailment as it is presently used. Entailment is a term used nowadays as part of the study of semantics. It is referred to as a term which describes a relation between a pair of sentences in which the truth of the second sentence necessarily follows from the truth of the first.

E.g.    "*I can see a tulip* entails 'I can see an flower'.

"One can not both assert the first and deny the second".

Lyons treated entailment from a logical point of view. He sees it as a relation between two terms A and B where A and B are variables standing for propositions such that if the truth of B necessarily follows from the truth of A, then A entails B.

E.g.    The sentence *John is a bachelor* entails three other sentences:

a. John is single.

b. John is a man.

c. John is a grown-up.

The relations between such words as *bachelor* and *single*, *man*, *grown-up* can be discussed in truth-conditional terms. The truth conditions in *John is a bachelor* are included in the conditions for *John is single*, *John is a man* and *John is a grown-up*. From this example, it should be clear that entailment here is not being

used in the sense of material implication, but, it is valid because of the truth functions assigned to it. Therefore, to say that *John is a bachelor* entails 'John is unmarried' is to say that in all possible situations, if the first is true, the second is true, too.

A relation of entailment arises between two statements every time an argument or predicate in one statement is hyponymous to an argument or predicate in the other. Thus, there is an accurate correspondence between entailment and hyponymy.

If two statements differ only in the substitution of a hyponym for a hypernym, then one of the statement entails the other.

Palmer points out that synonymy enables the dictionary-maker to define *gala* as *festivity* and vice versa, and may be, therefore, regarded as a special kind of hyponymy.<sup>66</sup> To understand the definition of synonymy as a kind of hyponymy, or the relation between the two, the following situation one can consider the following situation.

E.g. "It's an apple" entails "It's a fruit".

But the converse implication does not usually hold: "It's a fruit" does not entail "It's an apple". It follows that whereas

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<sup>66</sup> Palmer, F. R. 1986. *Semantics*. Cambridge: CUP. p.88.

hyponymy is an asymmetric relation based on unilateral entailment, synonymy involves mutual entailment, and may be, therefore, defined as a special kind of hyponymy, so-called "symmetric hyponymy"<sup>67</sup>.

Hyponyms and hypernyms have multiple layers. A superordinate at a given level can itself be a hyponym at a higher level, as in the following examples, where *house* is a hyponym of the hypernym *building*, but *house* itself is a hypernym for some other types of house types:

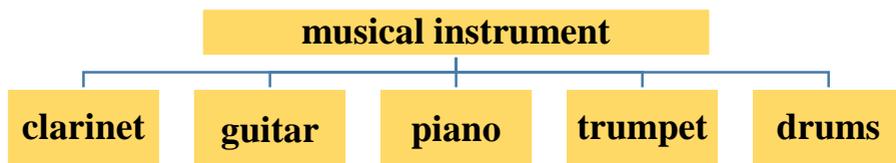
- E.g
- hypernym: *building* -hyponyms: *house*
    - hypernym:*house* -hyponyms:*cottage, cage*
  - hypernym: *cook*- hyponyms: *bake, boil, grill, fry, steam, roast*
  - hypernym: *fry*-hyponyms: *stir-fry, pan-fry, sauté, deep-fry*
  - hypernym:color-hyponyms:blue, red, yellow, purple
    - hypernym:purple-hyponym:violet, crimson
  - hypernym:living-hyponyms:bird, insect, animal
    - hypernym:bird-hyponym:sparrow,crow, fowl

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<sup>67</sup> Palmer, F. R. 1986.*Semantics*. Cambridge: CUP. p.88.

We thus have *sparrow*, *hawk*, *crow*, *fowl* as hyponyms of *bird* and *bird* in turn is a hyponym of *living beings*. So there is a hierarchy of terms related to each other through hyponymic relations.

Sometimes we can't have a super-ordinate term expressed just by one word:



*Figure II.7 Hyponyms*

Hyponymy is a good organizing principle for vocabulary learning and teaching, many language coursebooks organizing the information to be taught.

## CONCLUSIONS

Lexical semantics is concerned with aspects of word meaning and the semantic relations between words, as well as the ways in

which word meaning is related to syntactic structure. It has changed significantly during the last decades since classic texts like Lyons (1977) and Cruse (1986) were published. Such texts were written at a time when Structuralist lexical semantics essentially carried on separately from major [Generative] theories of grammar.

However, theories of grammar have become much more lexically-driven, demanding deeper attention to issues of lexical meaning. Unfortunately, lexical semantics is presented essentially as it was 30 years ago, in lexical semantics courses and in semantics textbooks with the focus limited to polysemy/homonymy and the ‘nym’ relations (synonym, antonym, etc.).

This work provides an introduction to some of the main themes in lexical semantic research, including the nature of lexical relations and the decomposition of words into grammatically relevant semantic features. The mapping between the semantics of words and their associated syntax is discussed in terms of thematic roles, semantic structure theory and feature selection. Lexical semantic relations are undervalued in the field of foreign language education, however they represent a significant means of acquiring new words necessary for a broader conceptual collection of words in mental dictionary.

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