

Meaning of Words: Description for Analytic Comparing

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Abstract—This article deals with theoretical and applied problems of structural semasiology. The problems are being discussed in modern linguistics. The authors note that the results of modern studies in the seme semasiology can help to increase the accuracy and objectivity of fixing the meanings of words and their semantic difference, these results are very significant and important in describing the modern linguistic consciousness. The article also shows that the problems to be solved by seme semasiology are directly related to the need for the development of a typology of semantic components which are to be clear for an average native speaker as well as for the development of metalanguage to describe the semantic components. The metalanguage is necessary to unificate in the interpretation of meaning for users in the lexicographical practice.

Keywords—structural semasiology; seme; meanings of words; linguistic consciousness; semantic components

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern semantic studies in different areas show that the meaning of a word is a complex unity of structural elements different in content and volume; the basic one in semantics of a language unit is the seme microcomponent.

The widespread use of cognitive, contrastive and experimental methods of analysis in semantics in modern linguistics shows that seme structure of meanings of linguistic units has a much greater variety than it seemed in the past stages of structural development of semasiology. In addition, the development of languages and cultures results in the emergence of new types of semantic components.

Unfortunately, the recognition of the fact that meanings of language units consist of semantic component seme is not realized while preparing practical lexicographical publications. This fact makes the semantics of language units difficult in teaching the native language and in teaching Russian as a foreign language, and also causes difficulties when using dictionaries.

So, we can see the necessity to understand well new semantic data at the present level and to put them into the system in the framework of the seme approach to the semantics of a word, i.e. within the framework of seme semasiology. And creating a natural meta-language for seme description is very necessary; it must be understandable by both its authors and ordinary dictionaries users.

It is necessary to develop the algorithm of seme description of meaning of a language unit and the matching process of translation correspondence of vocabulary in different languages. The problems of semantic equivalence and national specific features in semantics of lexical and phraseological units, as well as the principles of recording the results of the studies in bilingual lexicography, are to be theoretically based from the standpoint of seme semasiology.

The basic concepts in our work are: lexeme – the material side of words as a structural element of language; sememe – a separate part in the meaning of a word; semanteme – an ordered set of semes in a single lexeme; seme – a microcomponent of a meaningful structure of words which unites or differentiates separate sememes and reflects one of the features of the nomination subject.

Seme semasiology is a branch of semasiology, it researches lexical meaning as sememe, i.e. semantic units organized in a semanteme structure, their typology and relations with each other in a semanteme. As a branch of semasiology seme semasiology studies the lexical meaning of language units describing them as an ordered set of semes [1, pp 15-20].

A. Levels of word-meaning description.

As semantic analysis shows, various methods of describing the meaning of a word give different results; therefore the description of the semantics of the same word varies greatly in different linguistic paradigms and in different types of dictionaries. Traditionally, linguists describe the meaning of words basing upon the dictionaries' definitions. However, the context analysis of words always shows new semes which were not included in the dictionaries' definitions. Psycholinguistic analysis in semantics of the word complicates the problem when describing meaning of a word. The thing is that the meanings from psycholinguistic experiments always turn out to be much greater and deeper than in dictionaries, though linguists usually use the dictionary definitions in the semantic analysis of language units.

The meaning, recorded in the dictionaries, is created by lexicographers basing upon the reductionism principle, i.e. minimizing the features in a meaning. We emphasize that the lexicographic meaning is an artificial construct of lexicographers, some subjectively defined by a minimal set of features. It is offered to the dictionary users as a dictionary

definitions. The abovementioned idea does not detract the achievements of lexicographers, does not doubt the need and value of dictionaries – they are quite good for purpose to make the reader recognize a word. Experimental description of language units in semantics makes it possible to represent a word as a kind of psychological reality, as a deeper semantic entity, to identify some new semantic components in meaning of a word that are not given by other methods and semantic analysis techniques.

The set and the number of psycholinguistic meanings of the word usually turn out to be greater than the set and the number of meanings in the traditional lexicographical sources, and the ratio of the main and peripheral meanings in a psycholinguistic description often seems to be quite different from the dictionary description. It should be noted that there is another way to describe the lexical meaning – the method of exhaustive analysis of all recorded contexts of the word used. After the generalization process in meanings of contexts, it is usually called a communicative one as it shows the semantic components as really necessary for communication, so it becomes the subject of a message.

Communicative meaning can be individual but can reflect a communicatively relevant part of a system meaning. So, it is possible to speak at least about these levels of meaning description of lexical units as elements of language consciousness of native speakers:

Lexicographical meaning is logically formulated by the lexicographers as a minimal set of features for recognizing nuclear semes in the meaning of a word according to the lexicographers. Psycholinguistic meaning is a set of semantic components identified or verified by experimental techniques of different types, ranked according to relative brightness in the linguistic consciousness of native speakers. Communicative meaning is a meaning, including a set of semantic components, which are actualized in the contexts of words used in a language [2, pp. 45-48].

B. An aspect-structural method describing meaning of a word.

Semantic components of meaning can be divided into megacomponents, macrocomponents and microcomponents [3, p. 99]. Megacomponents are the greatest parts of meaning: the first one is traditionally called a lexical one; the second one is a structural-linguistic meaning.

The lexical meaning of a word is the reflection of extralinguistic reality fixed by this word. It also includes an emotional and evaluative attitude of a person to this reality. There are two macrocomponents in the lexical meaning: a denotative one and a connotative one. Denotative macrocomponent is a major component in lexical meaning of a word pointing to the properties, the attributes of an object. It conveys basic, communicative meaningful information.

There is information about the evaluative and emotional attitude of a person (the subject) to the object in the connotative macrocomponent. Structural-linguistic meaning is the information about word features where a word is as a functional unit of a language, i.e. it is reflected in the meaning of the linguistic reality. This megacomponent of a meaning

consists of macrocomponents too. The most important ones are a grammatical macrocomponent and a functional macrocomponent. The grammatical macrocomponent is the information about grammatical features of a word – gender, number, etc. The functional macrocomponent includes stylistic, social, temporal, frequency and territorial semes, the linguists and lexicographers think that they are undoubtful. Taking into account modern tendencies in language development, for example, its vocabulary, as well as the same semasiology today, a list of functional microcomponents necessary for some description of the values can be expanded, to our mind.

The problem of the so-called political correctness is paid special attention to among the linguists and sociologists in recent decades. During the communication process, a representative of any social institution must be cautious; in other words, he/she must be politically correct, especially when naming unpleasant reality phenomena, which is to be said about or discussed in a certain communicative situation. If the norms of speech behavior are abused (in other words, when you are not politically correct), the negative reaction or criticism or exposure of the addressee is very probable.

Vocabulary restriction notes about the use of certain words because of political correctness or political incorrectness are quite often now in English-language editions of the Oxford English Dictionary (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, The Oxford Dictionary of Current English), among them we note the following. For example, some people think that this word is offensive. (Some people consider this word offensive). – Taboo. Do not use this word. (Taboo. Do not use this word).

Taking into account this type of experience in the lexicographical words description, in our point of view, it is better to mark some special vocabulary to use or not to use them in public being an institutionally regulative and functional characteristic feature in their semantics as politically correct, politically incorrect.

We think that communication-toning microcomponents should be introduced into the structure of meaning of the functional macrocomponent because it helps to describe the features, reflecting the personal attitude of a speaker to the name object in some situational contexts and characterizes the pragmatic intention of a speaker expressed in this particular usage. The communicative-toning microcomponent is described by some types: neutral in tone, respectful, polite, admiring, friendly, affectionate, playful, ironic, sympathetic, familiar, pejorative, scornful, contemptuous, rude, expletive, vulgar).

It is important to note the communication-toning microcomponent to be the only systematically provided functional microcomponent, but realized in a context, i.e. there is a semantic feature of pragmatic intent in a system meaning, and in the meaning, some concretizers are filled with the specific context.

The proposed aspect-structural method to describe meaning of a word provides a potential opportunity to identify, describe and summarize information about the seme set; they make up a particular semantic area of the language.

II. METHODS

The aspect-structural method to describe meaning of a word is proposed and developed in our concept; it is natural if we take into account the meaning of a word as a combination of semantic components of different types. An aspect approach to semantics, to our mind, supposes the parts in the meaning structure of the semantic aspects – characteristic features, reflecting different types of information, fixed in the word [1, p. 120].

Semantic components are different in type and volume, represented in the semantics of a word or a phrase. That is why they are to be described differentially according to semantic aspects, and it is a strict must for creating a unified meta-language in seme description of lexical and phraseological units. The theoretical concepts are very important for aspect-structural descriptions. They are: 1) an aspect of seme description (denotative, connotative and functional semes); 2) unification of metalinguistic descriptions of the semantics within the semantic fields and thematic groups of vocabulary. 3) There is also the hierarchy of the family (archiseme, the dominant as well as the weak, nuclear and peripheral semes); 4) correlation of semes with the axiological scale of values (evaluation denotative semes, denotative and connotative social evaluation and emotion). These also include:

5) compatibility seme in the meaning structure and actualization in a communication act (alternative disjunctive and differential semes, determinate relations of semes);

6) variability of the unified metalinguistic descriptions (contextual evaluation, emotionality and communicative tone, semantic differential of characteristic concretizator);

7) a stereotyped description model in semantics as a tool to describe meaning of particular words in seme.

The paper uses the following research methods: analysis, experiment, a descriptive method, a method of component analysis, a method of field modeling, a method of semantic interpretation, a method of generalization of dictionary definitions, methods of quantitative, lexicographical, contextual, psycholinguistic analysis.

III. DISCUSSION

The theoretical problems of the semantic description of the meaning of a word are connected with the identification of its entity and structure.

The terms “meaning” and “sense” are closely interrelated because sense is internal, logical content (of words, speech, phenomenon), the meaning that is comprehended by human brains [1]. In our opinion, the terms “concept” and “meaning” are not identical, they are connected by the partial relationships (the concept is wider than the meaning, the meaning is a part of the concept that calls a word). All this

should be taken into account when studying and describing the meaning.

The seme method to describe meaning of a word is “the basic concept of seme semasiology when describing the meanings of words through the description of their seme composition” [8].

A. *Meta-language to describe meaning of a word in contrastive dictionaries.*

To present these research results effectively, it is necessary to develop a special meta-language of seme descriptions, which is like any meta-language must have a number of universal characteristics and at the same time must be understandable by an average native speaker and easy in use. Requirements for the meta-language of semantic description can be summarized as follows. Consistency is the elements of the meta-language that are ordered and look like a single conceptual unit. Limited functional orientation is the meta-language focused on the limited functions and unable to realize different and very important functions as any language realizes. Universality and sufficiency are in the areas where this meta-language is used. Fixing with the help of graphics is terms of the metalanguage as a language of a special type should be fixed in lexicographic sources in the written form. Openness being a language to describe a natural language, meta-language acts as a part of natural language.

“Technical” part of the meta-language of semantic description is important and fundamental for both theoretical and applied linguistics: which units are to be selected to describe the semantics of the natural language of artificial signs, or the signs of natural language. The problem of development and improvement of the metalanguage in description of word semantics is inseparable from theoretical linguistic meaning research and applying their results. To our mind, for seme semasiology, focusing on the fact that the meta-language of semantic description has to be understandable to ordinary language speakers. First of all, the metalanguage of semantic description in seme semasiology must meet the following requirements:

The main types of semes significant for our study are

- to be not artificial but natural;
- to be based on the usual well-known meanings of words in the native language;
- to be standardized (that is one variant should be chosen from metalinguistic different names of the same seme to be used in the description then).

The description of lexical meaning with the use of natural meta-language allows doing the unification procedure of seme descriptions, and it is important for deepening theoretical ideas about the linguistic meanings and their scientific descriptions. Unification of natural language for the purposes of semantic metalinguistic descriptions is an important task in seme semasiology. The unification of differential semes clears out the system relations of meanings with the help of similar semes and illustrates the meaning differences [4, p. 5].

For example, the description of lexical meanings by means of a small number of archisemes (“person”, “group of persons”) instead of the many variants from modern dictionaries (378 variants in the interpretation vocabulary to name persons in the Russian language), helps to describe the meanings of words in a more simple and clear way. It also allows one as well to show similarities and differences between them when compared at the same level.

B. Inner-language and inter-language analytic comparing of words.

To make the descriptions of word meaning more informative, and to further identify the correlative relationships between words of the same language or between interlingual equivalents, this algorithm is to be used as follows. First, in the framework of the denotative aspect of description one must distinguish the real semes in the sememe. Second, one must formulate these semes with the help of standardized seme meta-language for this aspect. Third, it is necessary to form seme definitions of the meaning aspect and to list them as the stereotyped semantics that the description model shows. Fourth, the framework of the connotative aspect in the description one has to find the connotative semes if any. Fifth, we must formulate these semes with the help of standardized seme meta-language right for this aspect. Sixth, one should form seme definition of the connotative aspect of meaning and list them as the stereotyped semantics description model shows. Seventh, in the framework of the functional aspect of description one must distinguish the real semes in the sememe. Eighth, we must formulate these semes with the help of standardized seme meta-language for this aspect (a functional one). Ninth, it is necessary to form seme definition of the functional aspect of meaning and to list them as the stereotyped semantics description model shows. 10. We have to describe the sememe in a generalized way with the help of all the found and formulated in the meta-language denotative, connotative and functional semes.

This is the example of the aspect-structural method to describe meaning of a word as well certain sememes according to the stereotyped semantics description model:

1. HERO sememe-1
 (“герой” in the Russian language)
DENOTATIVE ASPECT
 Person
 masculine
 accomplished a feat / courage displayed / shows readiness to self-sacrifice
CONNOTATIVE ASPECT
 Approving
 positive emotional
FUNCTIONAL ASPECT
 interstyle
 general use
 modern
 widespread
 frequent
 politically correct
 neutral

2. CONTRALTO semema-2
 (“контральто” in the Russian language)

DENOTATIVE ASPECT
 person
 female
 has a low singing voice
CONNOTATIVE ASPECT
 no value
 unemotional
FUNCTIONAL ASPECT
 interstyle
 musical
 modern
 widespread
 frequent
 politically correct
 neutral

To conduct a contrastive analysis of interlanguage equivalents some steps should be added to the above-described algorithm:

1. Selection for each sememe in the original language of equivalents in the compared language for matching and comparing.

2. Description of the seme structure of equivalents according to the above proposed scheme basing upon the dictionary definitions analysis, their usage in contexts, experimental information.

3. Correcting procedure and unification of seme description of sememe in the original language and its equivalents to clarify semes [5, p. 152].

The results of the stereotyped semantics description model of contrastive sememe pairs in two languages can be done in these variants:

3. HERO
 (“герой” in the Russian language) sememe-1 = HERO
 Person / person
 male / male
 accomplished the feat / accomplished the feat
 showed personal courage / showed personal courage
 willingness to make sacrifices / willingness to sacrifice
 approving / approving
 positive emotional / positive emotional
 interstyle / interstyle
 general use / general use
 modern / modern
 widespread / widespread
 frequent / frequent
 politically correct / politically correct
 neutral / neutral

or:

4. CONTRALTO
 (“контральто” in the Russian language) semema-2 =
CONTRALTO SINGER
 a person, female, has a low singing voice;
 no value, unemotional;

Interstyle, musical, modern, widespread, frequent,
politically correct, neutral

To unify meta-language in the same description and to name persons in the Russian and English languages, we used the following methodology. Dictionary definitions of meanings from different sources in two languages were compared and the unified descriptions of semantic characteristics were based on their analysis:

5. EYEWITNESS – EYEWITNESS

Russian Dictionary definitions:

Face, a direct observer of an event or events (Ushakov: 2006).

The one who was a direct witness, an observer of an event.
(Yefremova: 2000).

Man, who was a witness, an observer of an event (Kuznetsov: 2003).

The one who watches, watched some event, occurrence.
(Ozhegov: 1994).

English Dictionary definitions:

A person who has personally seen something happen and thus can give a first-hand description of it (The New Oxford American Dictionary: 2001).

A) a person present at an event who can describe what happened (Collins English Dictionary:2003).

A person who has seen someone or something and can bear witness to the fact (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language: 2001).

Someone who has seen something such as a crime happen, and is able to describe it afterwards (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English: 2000).

I The Russian/ English semes

Person / person

male / male, **female**

watching, watched an event or incident / watching, watched an event or incident

personally / personally

2 / is able to describe it later

No value / no value

unemotional / unemotional

interstyle / interstyle

general use / general use

modern / modern

widespread / widespread

frequent / frequent

politically correct / politically correct

neutral / neutral.

The methodology makes the seme structures of words in different languages comparable, makes it possible to expand parameters of seme description based on the information from national and foreign lexicographers both as well as to identify the national specific features of semantics in seme level (marked in black). The similar semes as well as different semes are identified in seme contrastive comparison.

6. CONNOISSEUR

(«знаток» in the Russian language) / CONNOISSEUR

Person / person

Male, female / male, female

has great special knowledge in some area/ has a large special knowledge in some area

is very good at understanding of smth./ has a fine understanding of smth

0 /especially in the fine arts, food, music, wine

No value / no value

unemotional / unemotional

interstyle / interstyle

general use / general use

modern / modern

widespread / widespread

frequent / frequent

politically correct / politically correct

neutral / neutral.

7. PIONEER

(«первопроходец» in the Russian language) / PATHFINDER

Person / person

Male, female / male, female

The first one / the first one in a group

Making the way / making the way

to learn smth. new / in the exploration of unknown lands

No value / no value

unemotional / unemotional

upper style / interstyle

general use / general use

modern / modern

widespread / widespread

low frequent / frequent

politically correct / politically correct

neutral / neutral.

As a result, the aspect-structural method allows describing meaning of a word. The stereotyped semantics description model can help to do the semantic contrastive analysis of equivalents in the two languages. This helps to find the absolute, close, approximate, and valid equivalents in the units of vocabulary, their quantitative composition as well as the presence of phenomena of seme/sememe absence or lacunarity in two (compared) languages.

IV. CONCLUSION

National specific features of a language are the language features which are different from other languages. A part of the national specific features of the language – the national specific features in semantics – is a reflection of national uniqueness of the reality in the semantics. It is studied by contrastive semasiology to identify specific macro- and microcomponents, semes or lexemes. It is shown in the form of non-equivalent lexemes, sememes, or semes; denotative seme specific features; connotative seme specific features; functional seme specific features.

Our study demonstrated seme semasiology to be an effective and promising field in modern semasiology; it allows one to describe the structure of meaning very close to the reality of language consciousness.

Theoretical research in the field of seme semasiology and contrastive lexicology allow us to speak about the wide

possibilities in practical application of the results: monolingual lexicography, bilingual lexicography, contrastive lexicography, cross-cultural communication, teaching Russian and English as foreign languages.

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