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Семантика как предмет обучения. Семантические сдвиги общераспространенных английских прилагательных

Semantics in Teaching. Semantic Shifts of Common English Adjectives

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Аннотация Статья посвящена рассмотрению изучения семантики английского прилагательного через семантические сдвиги. Автор уделяет особое внимание роли английских имен прилагательных, как специфических структур, в формировании адъективной картины мира, а также единиц, формирующих лексический запас и лингвокультурологическую компетенцию студентов.

Ключевые слова семантика; семантические сдвиги; прилагательное; английский язык.

Summary The paper considers teaching of English adjective significance though studying semantic shifts. The author emphasizes the role of adjectives as specific structures in performing adjectival worldview and forming vocabulary and linguacultural competence of students.

Key words semantics; semantic shifts; adjective; the English language.

The real significance of linguistic units is one of the most difficult aspects in language teaching. It is rather difficult to define the meaning of a word as it is connected with many lingual and extra lingual aspects – logical and psychological, historical and philosophical.

Humans have been using the language for a long time, though no one knows how long exactly. A word or any linguistic unit absorbs values of the ages in which it lives.

The problem of understanding the meaning of linguistic units is linked with a possibility of increasing our knowledge about the world diachronically. The meaning of linguistic units depicts and encapsulates historical and social development of the nation.

The article discusses the processes of origin and evolution of several common English adjectives because adjectives add colour to any language and it is natural that people try to interpret the hues.

Such an approach proceeds from an assumption (though debatable) that with every new explanation of the real significance of any English adjective our knowledge does increase, at least in the way that reveals hidden semantics of English adjectives in texts of different historical epochs.

"But if we want to characterize the semantic usage properly which is accepted in any speech community and belongs to the described language, we should not only describe it. We can achieve the result only by applying collective estimations which are adopted in the community so we must take into consideration the public opinion. One and the same thing may have different descriptions in different civilizations. Such semantic definitions must have substantial consequences for the formal analysis of linguistic units" [2, p. 405].

The meaning of English adjectives is dictated by popular usage, and adjectives are often changing meanings through a variety of processes.

The leading processes are metaphor and metonymy. They involve a change with the addition of meanings due to a semantic similarity or connection between the new sense and the original one. For example some colour-adjectives *(purple, kermes, saffron and so on)* took their names from places where the paint is used to colour or from the plants and animals that gave the name to the paint.

Old English *purpul* comes from Latin *purpura* and Greek *porphyra*. It is a borrowing of the ninth century. "The words originally meant purple fish or

shellfish and were the names for the whelk or snail from which a brilliant dark red or purple dye could be obtained. This dye was the bases for the wealth of the Phoenician trading empire, which flourished in the lands around the Mediterranean Sea several thousand years ago"[1, p. 68].

The next leading method of changing meaning is generalization.

Let us disclose the way it works in the language. For instance, at the beginning of the fifteenth century the word "fabulous" meant "mythical, legendary" resembling a fable, from Latin "fabulous" celebrated in fable, rich in myth; then it meant "incredible" because what is found in fables is incredible [7]. Now it has weakened even more and you can use it to describe any particular thing that you like.

The next example of generalization may be *"awful"*. It originally meant "inspiring awe" as in *awe of God* but since what inspires awe isn't always so pleasant, it came to mean something negative. By the 1300 the word *agheful* ment "worthy of respect of fear". *Aghe* is an early form of *awe* [5]. The original sense of awful – inspiring awe – doesn't even exist anymore.

"Awful" is one of many English adjectives which also has gone through the process of weakening, in which the sense of the word is toned down. The weakened sense "very bad" is from 1809 and the weakened sense of "exceedingly" exists from 1818 [4].

Adjectives can also transform through specialization or narrowing of meaning. The process indicates that an adjective passes from general usage and acquires some special meaning. When the meaning is specialized, the scope of the notion is narrowed, it has fewer referents, but the content of the notion is enriched, the notion will include a greater number of relevant features.

Because of the capricious nature of people, words are the subject to value judgements and go through the processes of pejoration and amelioration. Often this is the result of changes in society.

The case of pejoration we can illustrate by the adjective *"cheap"*. Old English noun *ceap* meant "traffic, a purchase" and only by the sixteenth century, the word starts to be used as an adjective.

"We first see this word used as a noun to mean "barter" or "bargain" or the place where these transactions occur, such as the shop of London's Cheapside. It is an ancient word, first seen rendered as "ceap" in Beowulf (first manuscript source, *circa* 1000). By the 16th century, the word starts to be used as an adjective with connotations of "lack of worth" in expressions such as "cheap talk", "cheap flattery", "cheap trick", "cheap and nasty" and "dirty cheap". By the end of the 16th century "cheap" was often used contemptuously to refer to people who were regarded as too familiar; by the middle of the 20th century the sense of the word improved a tad, and in many cases it is now used merely as a synonym for "inexpensive". Nevertheless, most people resent being called "cheap". The first citation of "cheapskate" is from 1896. The "skate" part, meaning "fellow", comes from the Scottish *skyte,* "contemptible person". Beginning in the 20th century, the term "cheap shop" has been pervasive. It started off as a term referring to unfair tackle in football, but it is often used outside football and even in non-sporting arenas"[3, p.11][6].

The adjective *cheap* went through evolution from the noun meaning "a barter, a purchase" to adjectival meaning "inexpensive".

Modern synonyms "*nice*" and "*pretty*" both went through the amelioration.

The word "*nice*" derives from the Latin *nescius,* "ignorant, unaware, simple, stupid, foolish" and the first sense of the word at the beginning of the twelfth century was "ignorant or foolish". Starting in the fourteenth century the word obtained many other senses, including "extravagant", "scrupulous", "coy", "dainty", "refined".

"In many examples from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it is difficult to say in what particular sense the writer intended it to be taken" [8].

In the middle of the eighteenth century the word started to be used as a synonym for "pleasant".

In Old English *prьttig* possessed a negative sense, and it was synonymous at first with "cunning" or "crafty" and later with "able", "clever" and "skilful". It was a derivative of the word *prьt,* "trick" or "wile". By the fifteenth century, we see the occasional use of "pretty" to mean "pleasing in appearance". But there were many other connotations. In the seventeenth century it acquired a sense akin to the way we use "nice" nowadays [9].

Many English adjectives also have gone through the process of weakening, in which the sense of the word is toned down. For instance, *dreadful* - "full of dread". In early thirteenth century it meant "causing dread" and by the seventeenth century appeared the weakened sense of the adjective "very bad".

Less often, some adjectives strengthen. In the modern English synonyms of *"elegant"* are bound to "beautiful", "graceful", "nice". But from the fifteenth century it included "fastidious", "foppish", "tasteless". "Although the adjective *"elegant"* was used positively during that era, it could also imply an unfavourable or unrefined use of ornament."[3, p.25]

Thus, studying and teaching the real significance of the English adjectives diachronically makes it possible to increase our knowledge of the adjactival worldview and how it is linked to the problem of understanding the meaning of linguistic expressions.

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**Лингвистическая репрезентация «Первой Симфонии» И. Брамса
в романе Дж.Б. Пристли «Улица Ангелов»
Linguistic Representation of "The First Symphony" by J. Brahms
in the Novel "Angel Pavement" by J.B. Priestley**

О.С. Камышева

O.S. Kamysheva

Аннотация Статья посвящена исследованию лингвистических средств реализации музыкального звучания «Первой Симфонии» И. Брамса, представленной в романе Дж.Б. Пристли «Улица Ангелов». Стилистические средства позволяют передать мело-