Lecture 4

SYNONYMS ANTONYMS HOMONYMS

# Synonyms

1. the definition of synonyms;
2. classifications of synonyms;
3. sources of synonymy;
4. criteria of synonymy.

# Antonyms

1. the definition of antonyms;
2. classifications of antonyms;
3. criteria of antonyms.

# Homonyms

1. the definition of homonyms;
2. sources of homonymy;
3. classifications of homonyms.

# Synonyms

1. **The Definition of Synonyms**

**Synonyms** can be defined as two or more words of the same language, belonging to the same part of speech and possessing one or more identical or nearly identical denotational meanings, interchangeable at least in some contexts, without any alteration on the denotational meaning, but differing in the morphemic composition, phonemic shape, shades of meaning, connotations, affective value, style,

valency and idiomatic use.

The words *to annoy, to vex, to irk, to bother* are synonyms. *To annoy, to vex* may mean both a non-intentional influence and an intentional one. *To irk, to bother* presuppose only the intentional influence. *To annoy* is a neutral word. *To vex* has a stronger shade. To bother presupposes the slightest reaction. The denotational meaning of all these words is the same: *to make somebody a little angry by especially repeated acts.* As it is seen from the example the synonymic group comprises **a dominant element**. This is the **synonymic dominant,** the most general term of its kind potentially containing the specific features rendered by all the other members of the group. Or in the Ukrainian language the word **бридкий** is a synonymic dominant in the synonymic row: *бридкий, огидний, гидкий, потворний, осоружний, негарний.*

The majority of English words are polysemantic. The result of it is that one and the same word may belong in its various meanings to several synonymic groups.

e.g*.: to appear* may have the synonyms, *to emerge, to come into sight and to look, to seem.*

# Classifications of Synonyms

**Absolute synonyms** are very rare in the language. They are mostly different names for one and the same plant, animal, disease etc.

e.g.: *luce – pike, compounding – composition, castor – beaver, алфавіт – абетка, буква – літера, процент – відсоток, площа – майдан, нагідки – календула.*

In the course of time absolute synonyms come to have either a different shade of meaning or different usage. If two words exactly coincide in meaning and use the natural tendency is for one of them to change its meaning or drop out of the language.

**Ideographic synonyms differ from each other in shades of meaning.** Synonyms of this kind are very numerous in the English language. In such synonyms we can easily find the general and the particular. The general connects such synonyms into one group, makes them representatives of one concept whereas the particular allows every synonym of the group to stress a certain feature of the concept. Thus all the synonyms express the concept in all its many-sided variety and completeness.

Not all ideographic synonyms are of the same kind. We can distinguish between those which are very close in their meanings (*horrible – terrible, screech – shriek*), synonyms which differ in meaning considerably. Thus, *interpreter* and *translator* denote the same concept of a person rendering the expressions of one language into the expressions of another but the oral side of the work is associated with the interpreter whereas the translator is connected with writing. Both ***ladder*** and ***stairs*** denote a set of parallel bars used for climbing up but ladder is associated with a rope contrivance or a portable device consisting of two beams crossed by a set of parallel bars while stairs represents a permanent arrangement mostly within a building, of blocks of wood or slabs of marble joined to form a long series of steps, stairway or staircase.

Among verbs we find **ideographic synonyms** which differ in the

manner of the action expressed by the verb: *to look (the synonymic dominant), to glance (to look quickly), to gaze (to look with surprise, curiosity), to stare (to look fixedly), to regard (to look attentively), to view (to look searchingly), to eye (to look from head to foot), to peep (to look stealthily).*

Synonyms can differ in the degree of a given quality, in the intensity of the action performed or the intensity of the emotions: to want – to desire – to long for; to ask – to beg – to pray; to work – to toil

* to slave.

Synonyms can also differ in the emotional colouring: *big – great; boy – lad.*

Synonyms can differ in the volume of the concept they express: *border – frontier*. Border is wider in meaning than frontier for the latter means mostly a state border whereas border is any limit, edge, etc. Happy is wider than lucky which implies only happy circumstances attending one’s undertakings.

There are synonyms where one expresses continuity of action or state while the other expresses a momentary action of the same nature: *to speak – to say; to remember – to memorise.*

Ukrainian scholars call such synonyms semantic: хата – дім – будинок, череда – отара – зграя.

**Stylistic synonyms do not differ in shades of their common meaning. They differ in usage and style:** *doctor (official) – doc (familiar); to commence (official) – to begin (neutral). They also show the attitude of the speaker towards the event, object or process described: to die – to depart, to expire – to kick the bucket; говорити –*

*балакати, базікати; ходити – шкандибати, дибати, пхатися, читальний зал – читалка, здібний – кмітливий.*

Ukrainian scholars distinguish between semantic-stylistic

synonyms: архітектор – зодчий.

**Phraseological synonyms** are those which do not necessarily differ materially in their meanings or stylistic value. They differ in their combinative power. Thus, in such groups as *few – little, many – much* we can speak not so much of any immediate difference in the meanings of words as of their difference in application (*much time – little water; many children – much air*). We say *a sunny day, a moonlit night but we should use the solar system, a lunar eclipse.*

**Phraseological synonyms** can replace each other in some combinations but are not interchangeable in others. Use and benefit are synonyms in such expressions as *public use, public benefit* whereas they are no longer synonyms and cannot replace each other in expressions like *I have no use for such books*, or He was given the benefit of the doubt. Перед, напередодні cease to be synonyms if they are used in the context: перед мостом, напередодні свята.

**Contextual synonyms** are similar in meaning only under some specific distributional conditions. The verbs *to bear, to suffer and stand* are semantically different and not interchangeable except when used in the negative form.

1. Sources of Synonymy

One of the sources of synonymy is **borrowings.** In Modern English a great number of synonyms serve to differentiate the meanings of words, their colloquial or bookish character. Most of bookish

synonyms are of foreign origin, while popular and colloquial words are mostly native. Many native synonyms were either restricted or ousted by foreign terms. e.g.: The native word *heaven* has been more and more restricted to the figurative and religious use for the Danish word *sky* began to be used exclusively in the meaning of *the blue above us* though originally *sky* meant only *cloud.* The Danish word *call* has ousted the Old English word *heitan*, the French word *army* ousted the native word *here.*

**Shifts of meaning** can lead to the appearance of synonyms: *knave* and *villain* once were not synonyms but their meanings degradated and they became synonyms.

**Shortening** can result in the appearance of synonyms:

*advertisement – ad; examination – exam.*

**Conversion** can be a source of synonymy: *a corner – to corner.*

# Criteria of synonymy

**Notional criterion**: Synonyms are words of the same category of parts of speech conveying the same notion but differing either in shades of meaning or in stylistic characteristics.

**Semantic criterion**: In terms of componential analysis synonyms may be defined as words with the same denotation or the same denotative component but differing in connotations or in the connotative component.

**The criterion of interchangeability**: Synonyms are words which are interchangeable at least in some contexts without any considerable alteration in the denotational meaning.

# Antonyms

1. **The Definition of Antonyms**

**Words with diametrically opposite meanings are called antonyms.** We find antonyms among words denoting:

* + quality: *hard – soft; good – bad; здоровий – кволий;*
  + state: *clean – dirty; wealth – poverty; чистий – брудний;*
  + manner: *quickly – slowly; willingly – unwillingly; швидко – повільно;*
  + direction: *up – down; here – there; тут – там;*
  + action or feeling: *to smile – to frown; to love – to hate; любити – ненавидіти;*
  + features: *tall – short; beautiful – ugly; високий – низький.*

Words which do not have relative features do not have antonyms.

# Classifications of Antonyms

Antonyms can be divided into two groups: **those which are formed with the help of negative affixes (derivational) and those which are of different roots.**

The most productive antonym-forming negative prefixes are un- (unhappy, unimportant), mis-(misfortune, misunderstanding). In the Ukrainian language that is the prefix не-(неправда, неволя). The prefix без- is also rather productive: безстрашний, безлад).

Antonym-forming suffixes impart to the word the meaning of the presence or absence of the quality or feature indicated by the root. The most productive antonym-forming suffixes are –*ful,-less: fruitful – fruitless; hopeful – hopeless.*

The second group (antonyms proper) includes words of different roots: *day – night; rich – poor, радість – горе, дружити – ворогувати.*

Considered in meaning antonyms can be divided into *absolute, phraseological and complex.*

**Absolute antonyms** are diametrically opposite in meaning and remain antonyms in any word-combinations. These are mostly found among negative affix-formed antonyms.

**Phraseological antonyms**. When they become components of phraseological groups or compound words they sometimes lose their absolutely antonymic nature.

e.g.: *to give –to take: to give a book – to take a book but to give*

way will not have to take way as its antonym.

**Phraseological antonyms cannot be used in parallel antonymic expressions indiscriminately**. We can say The books are alike - The books are different but we cannot say an alike book though we do say a different book.

**Complex antonyms** are those polysemantic words that have different antipodes for their various meanings.

e.g.: *Soft* has such meanings as

* + *not hard, yielding (soft seat, soft nature);*
* *not loud, subdued (soft voice, soft colours);*
* *mild, not severe (soft climate, soft punishment).*

Naturally all these meanings will find different words for antipodes:

- *hard (hard seat, hard nature);*

* *loud, harsh (loud voice, harsh colours);*
* *severe (severe climate, severe punishment).*

The Ukrainian word *сухий* can have the following antonyms*: мокрий, м’який, повний, емоційний.*

# с)Criteria of Antonyms

Antonyms have traditionally been defined **as words of opposite meanings.** This definition is not sufficiently accurate; as it only shifts the problem to the question of what words may be regarded as words of opposite meanings. **Two words are considered antonyms if they are regularly contrasted in actual speech.** A regular and frequent co- occurrence in such contexts is the most important characteristic feature of antonyms.

Another criterion is the possibility of substitution and identical **lexical valency**. Members of the same antonymic pair reveal nearly identical spheres of collocation.

e.g.: The adjective *hot* in its figurative meanings *angry* and *excited* is chiefly combined with unpleasant emotions (*anger, scorn*). Its antonym *cold* occurs with the same words. But *hot* and *cold* are used in combinations with the emotionally neutral words *fellow, man*, but not with the nouns implying positive evaluation friend, supporter.

Antonyms form binary oppositions, the distinctive feature of which is semantic polarity; its basis is regular co-occurrence in typical contexts combined with approximate sameness of distribution and stylistic and emotional equivalence.

# 2. Homonyms

**a) The Definition of Homonyms**

**Considering the word from the viewpoint of its semantic relations with other words we submit to our examination words having the same form but quite differing in meaning or homonyms.** Saying the same form we must add that the identity of form may be complete or partial.

There are **perfect or absolute homonyms,** that is words having entirely different meanings but absolutely identical in spelling and sound: ball – м’яч; ball – тюлень; деркач – птах, деркач – віник; бал

* вечір танців, бал - оцінка.

**Partial homonyms** are of two types: **homographs and homophones. Homographs are words identical in spelling but different in sound and meaning:** *bow [bou] – bow [bau], row [rou] – row [rau], о'бід - 'обід, за'мок -'замок*. **Homophones** are the words identical in sound but different in spelling and meaning: *knight – night; piece – peace; цеглина – це глина, потри – по три.*

# c) Classifications of Homonyms

From the viewpoint of their origin homonyms are divided into

# historical and etymological.

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

e.g.: plant (рослина) – plant (завод); pupil (учень) – pupil

(зрачок).

But sometimes it is difficult to decide whether all connection between the meanings of such words is lost and even the compilers of dictionaries hesitate how to treat such words.

**Etymological homonyms** are words of different etymology which come to be alike in sound or spelling. Various causes explain their appearance. Among these phonetical changes both in native and borrowed words played a great role.

e.g.: *can (могти) - Old English cunnan (знати); can (банка) – Old English canne (банка);*

*here (тут) – Old English her (тут);*

*to hear (чути) – Old English hieran (чути).*

Sometimes a native word and a borrowed word coincide in form, thus producing homonyms.

e.g.: *to bark (гавкати) – Old English beorcan and bark (кора дерева) from Scandinavian borkr (баркас).* Or the Ukrainian word *мул* (дрібні частинки у водоймах) coincided with *мул* (назва тварини, which is a Latin word).

In other cases homonyms are a result of borrowing when several different words became identical in sound and/or in spelling.

e.g.: The Latin word *vitim* (wrong, an immoral habit) has given the English vice (*порок)*, the Latin word *vitis* (*a spiral*) has given the English word *vice (лещата*). The Latin word *vice (instead, in place)* is found in *vice-president.*

In the Ukrainian language the word *гриф (*міфічна істота, which is a borrowing from Greek), *гриф* (частина струнного музичного

інструмента, a borrowing from German), *гриф* (штемпель на документі,a borrowing from French).

# Considering homonyms in their morphological aspect prof. Smirnitsky classifies them into lexical and lexico-grammatical. Lexical homonyms are of two types: perfect and partial. Perfect homonyms belong to the same part of speech with all forms coinciding: case (випадок) – case (сумка). Partial homonyms belong to the same part of speech but coincide only in some of their forms: to lie -–lay – lain; to lie – lied – lied. Lexico-grammatical homonyms are represented by:

1. **words belonging to the same part of speech but homonymic in their grammatical forms** (excluding their initial forms): bore -to bore (the Past Indefinite of to bear);
2. **words belonging to different parts of speech and homonymic only in some of their forms:** *I – to eye; nose – knows.*