



SEMANTIC ORGANIZATION OF SYNONYMIC ATTRACTION IN COLLOQUIAL LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the phenomenon of synonymic attraction in colloquial speech as a result of semantic redundancy and expressive nomination. It analyzes centers of synonymic attraction, their social and psychological conditioning, as well as interstylistic interaction of lexical units. Special attention is paid to mobile synonymy and the role of emotionally significant conceptual domains in shaping non-standard vocabulary.

KEYWORDS: colloquial speech, stylistically lowered vocabulary, synonymic attraction, mobile synonymy, semantic redundancy, stylistic shift, variability, interstylistic synonymy, lexico-semantic field, social conditioning of language.

INTRODUCTION

Colloquial speech as a stylistically lowered layer of the language is of particular interest for linguistic analysis due to its high degree of variability, expressiveness, and dynamism. One of its characteristic features is semantic redundancy, resulting from active processes of nomination and reinterpretation. Under conditions of weakened normative constraints typical of everyday communication, colloquial speech becomes a sphere of intensive synonymic variation, within which stable centers of synonymic attraction are formed. Their study makes it possible to identify socially and psychologically significant conceptual spheres that reflect the value orientations and emotional dominants of the linguistic community.

A characteristic feature of colloquial speech is variability, which is most fully manifested in semantic redundancy, through which, in many cases, the expressive coloring of a designation is created. The naming of the same object, action, or their attributes by two or more words is meaningful only when newly emerging designations of phenomena of reality differ in some way from those already existing in the language. If no such differences exist, then either one of them will disappear from the language, or semantic differentiation will occur between them. Thus, historically, such words as honey 'dear' and movie 'cinematography', which are now fully literary, were expressively lowered at the moment of their emergence.

The specificity of colloquial speech lies in the fact that in the process of nomination the psychological factor plays a dominant role, allowing the speaker, under conditions of communicative freedom, to express themselves emotionally. The restraining force of norms of speech etiquette in everyday communication is weakened, and the degree of moral and ethical lowering of an utterance is largely determined by the emotional state of the speaker, their social position in society, the conditions under which the communicative act takes place, its participants, as well as speech bravado characteristic of the younger generation. In striving to find the most adequate verbal reflection of their emotions, a speaker in everyday

communication may go beyond the boundaries of standard vocabulary as insufficiently expressive. As a rule, a newly created unit functions as a synonym of a word or phrase already existing in the language, and not the only one; however, this does not constitute an obstacle for individual speech creativity. On the contrary, ready-made colloquial (intrastylistic) synonyms, as they are used—often dictated by fashion—undergo semantic erosion and give way to new ones. Therefore, one of the most characteristic features of colloquial vocabulary is “mobile synonymy,” which concentrates numerous synonymic series around centers of synonymic attraction. Centers of attraction reflect those spheres of life and activity of linguistic communities (or a community) in which the emotional load of an utterance is dictated by material living conditions, the general ideology of the members of the collective, and individual norms of speech behavior shaped by family upbringing, educational level, social status, age, and gender.

Centers of synonymic attraction may be common to all speakers of a language. As noted by S. Ullmann, a permanent center of synonymic attraction is the idea of death [3, p. 150]. This conceptual sphere is represented in various languages by an extensive lexico-semantic field that includes inter- and intrastylistic synonyms, with the largest number of synonyms grouped around the neutral dominant die: standard synonyms — perish, depart, pass away, expire; non-standard synonyms — pop off, snuff out, check out, drop the cue, kick the bucket, sling one's hook, slip one's cable, go west, peg out, and others. A similar distribution of interstylistic synonyms, indicating the universality of this phenomenon, is also observed in the Russian language. Compare the neutral dominant умереть: standard synonyms — скончаться, угласнуть, почить, уйти в мир иной, приказать долго жить, отдать Богу душу; non-standard synonyms — загнуться, окочуриться, сдохнуть, околеть, отдать концы, and others.

Alongside general-language centers of attraction, so-called “hot spots” of colloquial speech can be identified, which permeate all its stratification layers. These include, in particular, such conceptual spheres as parts of the human body and physiological functions, money and monetary circulation, alcoholic beverages (their consumers and the state arising as a result of their consumption), drug addiction, entertainment events (popular and jazz music and its performers), and some others.

The dictionary compiled by H. Wentworth and S. Flexner records more than two hundred nominative units designating money and monetary units. Several dozen synonyms form a series with the dominant money: ammo, ballast, bark, beans, bucks, bones, change, dough, feed, jack, mazuma, moola, ochre, oday, rhino, rind, shekels, tlac, wampum, and others [5, p. 256]. Many of them are accompanied by labels indicating slang (predominantly of the criminal underworld): blunt, geedus, quiff, scrip. The series also includes words and phrases in which, alongside the general meaning, a specialized meaning is highlighted for banknotes (green, cabbage, lettuce, scratch, stamps, hides) or coins (hardtrack, bullet, tin), cash (dust, Oscar, the ready), their source (boodle ‘money stolen from public funds’, buscar ‘money borrowed’, cherry pie ‘unexpected money or money earned through moonlighting’), or their intended purpose (soap, sugar, cush ‘money intended for a bribe’). This list can be supplemented by newer formations cited in the dictionaries of C. Barnhart [2, pp. 235–236]: frog hair ‘money intended for political campaigns’, drugola ‘a bribe received by police officers from drug dealers’, hat ‘a bribe given to an official in order to avoid legal proceedings’.

As can be seen from the examples given, the quantitative composition of a syncretic series is directly dependent on the social significance of the designated object for society as a whole. It is therefore not accidental that the dominant money unites one of the most extensive syncretic series, incorporating both codified colloquial and non-codified non-standard vocabulary. Competing with it in English, and especially in American colloquial speech, is the series with the dominant drunk. The list provided in the appendix to the dictionary by H. Wentworth and S. Flexner includes 334 words and phrases, many of which emerged during the period of Prohibition, with the criminal underworld actively participating in their creation by "organizing" the production of alcoholic beverages or smuggling them into the country. The most frequently used designations of the state of euphoria arising under the influence of alcohol or drugs include bagged, blitzed, bombed, bangoed, boxed, crushed, featured, flaked out, frozen, glazed, and others. From a linguistic point of view, this group is indicative in that it denotes not a qualitative feature but a state; therefore, it is more often composed of past participles of simple and denominal verbs or prepositional phrases characterized by predicative relations with the subject, and less frequently by adjectives.

Redundancy naturally extends only to stylistically lowered vocabulary. It is widely represented there, since everyday communication constitutes its nourishing environment. Accordingly, our conclusions regarding certain aspects of interstylistic synonymy do not extend beyond stylistically lowered and neutral vocabulary and do not have a generalizing character for the language as a whole.

It is quite evident that elevated, poetic vocabulary designating positive emotions has its own centers of attraction (the spheres of love, beauty, devotion, heroism, and others), in which colloquial speech is either entirely absent or represented by a small number of formations that are deliberately coarse in nature, with an emphasis on the physiological basis that evokes emotions. Syncretic series may also include words belonging to the official-business or bureaucratic style of speech, characteristic of professional communities. A typical example of this can be found in the speech clichés of state legal institutions in England and the United States.

Stylistically marked layers of vocabulary that are opposed to one another may collide in speech utterances, creating an arsenal of special stylistic means of text organization. Of particular interest here is the fact that stylistic shifts in word usage are, as a rule, characterized by a movement "from below upwards": "Honestly, old bean, — I mean, dear old thing, — I mean darling" [6, p. 17] — the author of the remark, a quite respectable young man, addresses his fiancée, a woman of the same social status. "Oi wuz standing on th' fire escape, sorr", said Officer Donahue, in a tone of obsequious respect which not only delighted, but astounded Archie, who hadn't known he could talk like that, "accordin to instructions when I heard a suspicious noise. I crope in, sorr, and found this duck — found the accused, sorr — in front of th' mirror, examenin himself. I then called to Officer Cassidy for assistance. We pinched — arrested um, sorr" [6, p. 37] — direct speech conveys the utterance of an uneducated American police officer.

A "stylistic break," when a speaker shifts from official-business to lowered vocabulary, occurs somewhat less frequently: There is only one thing to do. I'll go to Governor Stark, get him to agree to arrest Coffee on the grounds of an attempted bribery of an official — Adam is an official, you know — and call on Adam to swear to the charges. If he'll swear to them. That ought to make him see how things line up. That ought to show him the Boss will protest him. And — "to

that point I had only been thinking of the Adam end but now my mind got to work on the possibilities of the situation" — it wouldn't do the Boss any harm to hang a rap on Coffee. Particularly, if he will squeal on the behind-guy. He might bust up Larson. And with Larson out, Mak Murfee wouldn't mean much. He might hang it on Coffee, too, if you — "and I stopped dead" [4, p. 218]. The remark is interrupted by the author's narration (in the novel All the King's Men the narrative is in the first person), which lowers the expressive key of the utterance due to the use of vocabulary employed by Willie Stark in conversations with "his" people; compare: to arrest on the grounds ... and hang a rap on, squeal on, hang it.

The analysis conducted shows that centers of synonymous attraction in colloquial speech are formed around socially significant and emotionally marked conceptual spheres directly connected with the everyday experience and communicative needs of language users. The quantitative and qualitative composition of synonymous series is directly determined by the degree of significance of the designated objects and phenomena in social practice. Colloquial vocabulary is characterized by high mobility of synonymous relations: established nominations become semantically neutralized over time and are replaced by new expressive units. Thus, synonymous attraction functions as an important mechanism for the renewal and expressive enrichment of lowered vocabulary, reflecting the dynamics of social and communicative reality.

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