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**THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE  
TYPES OF SEMANTIC CHANGE**

**Summary**

Language deals with concepts strongly connected with experience, and as experience fluctuates according to many facts in time and space, words referring to such concepts fluctuate too. Although language changes are self-evident and very frequent, they are, at least synchronically, imperceptible and difficult to explain. More often, languages will differ in the precise correspondences between words, so that some languages have broad words with many meanings. They must be translated into multiple words in another language. Words are slowly changing in meaning even now, though the changes happen at the speed of continental drift. Unlike other types of linguistic change, like sound or spelling changes, semantic change is strongly linked to arbitrary cultural and social changes, thus making it very strenuous to predict the direction or depth of this change. The study of semantic change is also known as semantic shift, semantic progression or semantic drift can be observed as a part of etymology, onomasiology, semasiology, and semantics. Furthermore, there are two aspects of semantic change. Change in denotation in which the meaning of a lexeme is 'extended' or 'restricted'; and change in connotation in which a word may be 'ameliorated' or 'pejorated'. Change in the stylistic meaning of words where the meaning of words may be changed radically according to their context. Humans naturally tend to generalize, and this affects their use of language. This is one of the causes of the semantic phenomenon known as semantic broadening (also termed extension, widening, and generalization). In this process, a specific feature of the word is dropped or the word is used outside its original specific context to refer to a more generalized concept or object. The style and context often cause words to shift their meanings, sometimes radically. Sometimes words are used ironically to mean the opposite. Semantic change is highly irregular in direction due to the irregularity of its causes. These causes are usually interrelated, and semantic change is rarely the result of one cause exclusively.

**Key words:** metonymy, metaphor, generalization, specialization, semantic degradation, ellipsis

Changes in meaning are as common as changes in form. They can be internally or externally motivated. The word field in which words and their meanings stand in a network of relationships in semantics is basically called semantic change. Semantic change is the process of development of a new meaning or any other change of meaning. It can be viewed dispassionately as a natural process, but it can also be invested with a spiritual significance. Developments in linguistic theory may also increase understanding of semantic change, which has long been seen as a domain where description is the highest achievable goal. As is commonly known, all words have a meaning, but since English first appeared from its base language which is Anglo-Saxon, the meanings of words have undergone changes. The present article sustains a view about semantic changes – including a broadening of meaning, a narrowing of meaning or a complete shift in meaning altogether. The discussion of meaning change is often emotionally charged, with the meanings perceived as “improving” -

amelioration or “worsening” – pejoration - over a certain course of time. On one hand, some changes of meaning are due to what may be described as purely linguistic causes, factors acting within the language system. On another hand, some semantic changes may be accounted for by the influence of a peculiar factor usually referred to as linguistic analogy. Semantic change due to the differentiation of synonyms is a gradual change observed in the course of language history, sometimes, but not necessarily, involving the semantic assimilation of loan words.

### **Types of semantic change**

The alteration of meaning occurs since words are constantly used. The case is that what is intended by speakers is not exactly the same each time. If a different intention for a word is shared by the speech community and becomes established in usage then a semantic change has occurred. The abovementioned is the major reason of semantic change. Semantic change as well in terms, is also called semantic shift. Change in the meanings of words, especially with the passage of time, the study of which is historical semantics.

At the simplest level, only two types of meaning were distinguished:

1. generalization - a word's meaning widens to include new concepts.
2. specialization - a word's meaning contracts to focus on fewer concepts.

There are four basic types of semantic change which on the one hand refer to the range of a word's meaning and on the other, to the way the meaning is evaluated by speakers.

### **Generalization**

Generalization is also known as extension, generalization is the use of a word in a broader field of meaning than it originally meant to be, often referring to all items in a class, rather than one specific item. [1] It is a natural process, where the speaker has a limited vocabulary at his/her disposal, either because the speaker is young and fledgling and just acquire language skills and he/she is not a master of a language or a native speaker.

**Generalization** or widening of meaning - the scope of the new notion is wider than that of the original one, whereas the content of the notion is poorer. In majority of cases generalization is combined with a higher order of abstraction than in the notion expressed by the earlier meaning.

**Specialization** – also known as narrowing is the reduction of scope of the meaning. A word which formerly represented a notion of a broader scope has come to render a notion of a narrower scope. When the meaning is specialized, the word can name fewer objects, have fewer referents. At the same time the content of the notion is being enriched, as it includes a greater number of relevant features.

Narrowing refers to the opposite of broadening, and is defined as a reduction in the contexts in which a word can appear. One example of this would be the word 'girl', which originally meant a child of either gender, rather than a female child. The word has evolved to mean what was only part of its original definition, and this is semantic narrowing.

The simplest type of semantic change is a shift. [2] To take a closer look at all changes in meaning shows that alterations in meaning can be classified according to type. Broadening occurs when over time the meaning of a word has grown to be applicable in contexts that it previously wasn't, and to mean things it previously didn't - it's meaning has simply expanded.

A shift in meaning differs completely from broadening and narrowing in that the word now retains none of its original definition and has come to mean something else entirely.

Semantic degradation - A disapproval in the meaning of a word. Degradation is the process by which a word's meaning worsens or degenerates, coming to represent something less favorable than it originally did. In official contexts, however, the term ‘peasant’ is found for small and/or poor farmers. Degradation or pejoration involves a lowering in the social scale.

Semantic amelioration - An improvement in the meaning of a word. Amelioration is the process by which a word's meaning improves or becomes elevated, coming to represent something more favorable than it originally referred to. Amelioration or elevation is a semantic shift undergone by words due to their referents coming up the social scale.

### **Categories of Semantic Change**

The categorization of semantic change – that is in this case the ways in which words can change their meanings – used to be the major field of interest in historical linguistics for a long time. Therefore, there is a wide variety of literature available on this topic. But still, the different types of semantic change can be divided into basic types. Following this further, all of them have in common that they only generate semantic change when the use of a word in a certain way becomes wide-spread among a speech community.

As the most predominant or productive manner of semantic change there is **metaphor**, which is “the transfer of a literal meaning to a figurative area” (Jucker 114). [3] A good example of this is the word *head*, which originally only referred to the top part of a living creature's body. This distinct feature of the head could then be used metaphorically and transferred to other areas of life, as when using expressions like “head of the department”; thereby, the word *head* has extended its meaning capacity from only referring to a body part to also referring to people on high levels of professional life. Metaphorical extension is the extension of meaning in a new direction through popular adoption of an originally metaphorical meaning. Metaphorical extension is almost a natural process undergone by every word. We don't even think of it as meaning change. In its less obvious instances, we don't even see it as extending the meaning of a word.

**Metaphor** is a transfer of name based on the association of similarity and thus is actually a hidden comparison. It presents a method of description which likens one thing to another by referring to it as if it were some other one.

Another important way to change meanings is through **metonymy**, which is “the substitution of a word referring to an attribute for the thing that is meant” (Jucker 115). [4] An example is the use of the word *crown* for a monarch, relying on the common knowledge of speakers and listeners that it is normally only monarchs who wear crowns. Metonymy is a figure of speech where one word is substituted for a related word; the relationship might be that of cause and effect, container and contained, part and whole.

**Metonymy** - is a transfer of name based on the association of contiguity. It is a shift of names between objects that are known to be in some way or other connected in reality. The transfer may be conditioned by spatial, temporal, causal, symbolic, instrumental, functional and other relations.

The third major way in which words can change their meanings is by means of **euphemisms**. Speakers use euphemisms whenever they are in need of an inoffensive expression for an otherwise offensive utterance (cf Jucker 115 - 116). [5] For example, it is highly inappropriate in Western cultures to speak of bodily functions in polite conversations. Therefore, speakers use euphemisms – and teach them to their children – in order to be able to speak politely, e.g. the child can speak of “number one” or “number two” in order to express its need to go to the bathroom.

**Ellipsis** is the formal metonymy-forming mechanism. Ellipses is defined as the omission of a word or words considered essential for grammatical completeness but not for the conveyance of the intended lexical meaning.

Changes depending on the social attitude to the object named, connected with social evaluation and emotional tone, are called amelioration and pejoration of meaning.

Furthermore, speakers can use the stylistic device of **irony** to alter the meaning of a word; ironical use of words occurs when they are used in a way contradicting their normal use

**Implicatures** are another device that can lead to meaning change. Implicatures are implicit meanings of utterances, or “additional conveyed meanings”. For example, if a speaker says that he succeeded in writing a paper, the word *succeed* implies that he tried to write his paper. These implicatures occur frequently in every day speech, but “because of their situation dependence they do not normally function as resources in semantic change”. However, some of them “occur regularly with specific words and may, therefore, become conventionalised and part of the meaning of this word” (Jucker, 116). [6]

The conjunction *since*, for instance, originally only had a temporal meaning (‘from the time that’). However, in many cases a temporal sequence also implies a causal sequence. The utterance “Since he moved, he has been doing better” may be understood in a strictly temporal sense, but generally it will be understood that his success was somehow caused by his moving.

**Loan translations** are also a resource for semantic change. Yule describes loan translation as “a direct translation of the elements of a word into the borrowing language”.

The final resource Jucker gives is **reanalysis**, which he gives the following example for: *dessicated* originally only means ‘dried’. After introducing some of the ways in which words can change their meanings, there will now be a description of the results of semantic change.

**The semantic motivation** - implies a direct connection between the central and marginal meanings of the word. Semantic motivation is based on the coexistence of direct and figurative meanings within the semantic structure of the word.

Word meaning is liable to change in the course of the historical development of language. There are distinguished causes of semantic change, nature and results of the process of change of meaning.

#### **Nature of Semantic Change.**

Generally speaking, a necessary condition of any semantic change, no matter what its cause, is some connection, some association between the old meaning and the new. There are 2 kinds of association involved as a rule in various semantic changes namely:

- a) similarity of meanings
- b) contiguity of meanings.

#### **Causes of Semantic Change**

The factors accounting for semantic changes may be roughly subdivided into groups: a) extra-linguistic; b) linguistic.

By extra-linguistic causes various changes in the life of the speech community are meant, i.e. changes in economic and social structure, changes in scientific concepts.

Some changes of meaning occur due to purely linguistic causes, i.e. factors acting within the language system. The commonest form which this influence takes is the so-called ellipsis. In a phrase made up of two words one of these is omitted and its meaning is transferred to its partner.

Another linguistic cause is discrimination/differentiation of synonyms which can be illustrated by the semantic development of a number of words. In OE the word *land* meant both “solid part of earth’s surface” and “the territory of a nation”. In the Middle English period the word *country* was borrowed as its synonym. The meaning of the word *land* was somewhat altered and “the territory of a nation” came to be denoted by the borrowed word *country*.

Fixed context may be regarded as another linguistic factor in semantic change. For example, the word *token*, when brought into competition with loan word *sign*, became restricted

in use to a number of set expressions, such as love token, token of respect and also became specialized in meaning.

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Природа и причины семантических изменений. типы семантических изменений

#### Резюме

Язык имеет дело с понятиями, тесно связанными с опытом, и поскольку опыт колеблется в соответствии со многими фактами во времени и пространстве, слова, относящиеся к таким понятиям, также колеблются. Хотя языковые изменения очевидны и очень часты, они, по крайней мере, синхронно, незаметны и трудны для объяснения. Чаще всего языки будут отличаться точным соответствием между словами, так что некоторые языки имеют широкие слова со многими значениями. Они должны быть переведены в несколько слов на другом языке. Слова постепенно меняются в значении даже сейчас, хотя изменения происходят со скоростью континентального дрейфа. В отличие от других типов языковых изменений, таких как изменения звука или орфографии, семантические изменения тесно связаны с произвольными культурными и социальными изменениями, что делает очень трудным прогнозирование направления или глубины этих изменений. Изучение семантических изменений также известно как семантический сдвиг, семантическая прогрессия или семантический дрейф могут наблюдаться как часть этимологии, ономазиологии, семасиологии и семантики. Кроме того, есть два аспекта семантических изменений. Изменение в обозначении, в котором значение лексемы является «расширенным» или «ограниченным»; и изменение коннотации, при которой слово может быть «улучшено» или «унижено». Изменение стилистического значения слов, при котором значение слов может быть радикально изменено в соответствии с их контекстом. Люди, естественно, склонны обобщать, и это влияет на их использование языка. Это одна из причин семантического феномена, известного как семантическое расширение (также называемое расширением, расширением и обобщением). В этом процессе конкретная особенность слова отбрасывается, или слово используется за пределами его исходного специфического контекста для ссылки на более обобщенную концепцию или объект. Стиль и контекст часто заставляют слова менять свое значение, иногда радикально. Иногда слова используются по иронии судьбы, чтобы означать обратное. Семантические изменения

крайне нерегулярны в направлении из-за нерегулярности их причин. Эти причины обычно взаимосвязаны, и семантические изменения редко являются результатом исключительно одной причины.

**Ключевые слова:** метонимия, метафора, обобщение, специализация, семантическая деградация, многоточие

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### Semantik dəyişikliklərin xarakteristikaları və səbəbləri semantik dəyişikliklərin növləri

#### Xülasə

Dil məzmunu təcrübə ilə sıx əlaqəlidir və aparılan təcrübə zaman və məkandan asılı olaraq dəyişir, dil məzmunu ilə əlaqəli sözlər də dəyişir. Dildə olan dəyişikliklər kifayət qədər sürətlə biruzə versə də, onların sinxron şəkildə anlaşılması və izah edilməsi çətinidir. Əksər hallarda dillər bir-birindən sözlər arasındakı uyğunluqla əlaqəli fərqlənir, buna görə bəzi dillərdə çoxlu sayda çoxmənalı sözlərə rast gəlmək mümkündür. Onlar digər dillərdə çoxmənalı sözlər kimi tərcümə olunmalıdır. Dəyişikliklər qitələr arası məsafədən asılı olaraq baş versə də, sözlər hal-hazırda da öz mənalarını dəyişir. dəyişir. Səs və ya orfoqrafiya dəyişiklikləri kimi digər dil dəyişikliklərindən fərqli olaraq, semantik dəyişikliklər ixtiyari mədəni və sosial dəyişikliklərlə sıx bağlıdır ki, bu dəyişikliklərin istiqamətini və ya dərinliyini əvvəlcədən müəyyənləşdirmək çox çətinidir.. Semantik dəyişikliklərin öyrənilməsi semantik gerilik, semantik irəliləyiş kimi etimologiya, onomasiologiya, semasiologiya və semantikanın bir hissəsi kimi də müşahidə edilə bilər. Bundan əlavə, semantik dəyişikliyin iki növü var. Həqiqi mənada "genişləndirilmiş" və ya "məhdudlaşdırılmış" olan təyinatdakı dəyişiklik; və sözün mənasının "kiçildilməsi" və ya "alçaldılması" ilə əlaqəli bir dəyişiklik. Sözlərin üslubi mənalarının dəyişdirilməsi, burada sözlərin mənasını kontekstinə uyğun olaraq kökündən dəyişdirmək olar. İnsanlar təbii olaraq ümumiləşdirməyə meyillidirlər və bu da onların dildən istifadəsinə təsir göstərir. Bu, semantik genişlənmə (genişlənmə, genişlənmə və ümumiləşdirmə adlanır) kimi tanınan semantik fenomenin səbəblərindən biridir. Bu müddətdə, sözün müəyyən bir xüsusiyyəti atılır və ya söz daha çox ümumiləşdirilmiş anlayışa və ya obyektə istinad etmək üçün orijinal spesifik kontekstdən kənar istifadə olunur. Stil və kontekstdə sözlər tez-tez mənalarını dəyişir, bəzən kökündən dəyişir. Bəzən sözlərin əks mənasını ifadə etmək üçün ironiyadan istifadə olunur. Semantik dəyişikliklər nizamsızlığın səbəbi ilə müəyyən qədər öz istiqamətindən fərqli çıxış edir. Bu səbəblər ümumiyyətlə bir-biri ilə əlaqəlidir və semantik dəyişikliklər olduqca nadir hallarda yalnız bir səbəbdən asılı olaraq nəticələnir.

**Açar sözlər:** metonomiya, metafora, ümumiləşdirmə, məhdudlaşdırma, semantik degradasiya, ellipsis

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