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GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SYNONYMS AND ANALYZE THEIR MEANING

Annotation: In this article, the general properties of synonyms, their use and meanings in language, as well as their mutual equivalents have been studied by comparison. As well as, we studied synonyms from many aspects including syntax, lexicology, semantics,the novelty also lies in the fact that we studied more deeply types and different meaning of synonyms in modern linguistics.Sources of synonyms and their usage in contexts are closely related areas and this is bound to the meanings of words.

Key words: synonyms, identical meaning, interchangeable, native word, borrowed word, connotation, emotive meaning, academic prose, formal style, informal style

The phenomenon of synonymy cannot be fully understood without explaining the field of linguistics and some important subclasses of its wide spectrum. The reason for looking at synonymy from the larger frame within lexicology is that some basic or detailed concepts are used throughout this sequential practical part. The basic distinctions of linguistics are essential for

orientation in the system and all the subclasses and terms which are to be explained have a direct connection to synonymy.

Linguistics is frequently defined as the science of language. It is a wide complex system formed by many subfields requiring clear linguistic clarification of the research area. It constitutes a well-formed hierarchy but the fields are extremely diffuse. Linguistics can be studied from many points of view. Lyons [8,55] distinguishes four main dichotomies of linguistics study:

a) General and descriptive linguistics

General linguistics deals with the study of language in general, not one particular language. Theories of general linguistics are studied empirically within the descriptive linguistics of a language.

Descriptive linguistics analyses particular languages and theories within one language. Descriptive linguistics proceeds from the theories and concepts of general linguistics. I would like to illustrate my point with an example on the category of parts of speech. General linguistics deals with the theory of parts of speech, e.g. the explanation of the phenomenon. The principles of the theory are researched by descriptive linguists finding possible evidence in support or refutation of a hypothesis. In descriptive linguistics, parts of speech would be studied in specific examples. Synonymy in this thesis is studied practically, so I work with descriptive linguistics.

b) Diachronic and synchronic approaches

These two approaches are concerned with the historical development of a particular language, in this case, the English language. Changes during the development of a language are the subject matter of the diachronic approach.

The synchronic approach, on the other hand, is concerned with the particular form of a language at a specific point in time. The synchronic approach is significant for synonymy study. We are concerned with synonyms appearing in contemporary English language.

c) Theoretical and applied linguistics

Theoretical linguistics, as the name suggests, deals with models of linguistic theories on language structures and functions. Theoretical linguistics is concerned only with theoretical models that can be attested to practical applications. I describe the main theory related to synonymy in the theoretical part.

Applied linguistics works practically following the theory and processing the theoretical foundations in a practical way. It can be illustrated using an example of pronouns use. Theoretical linguists formulate a theory of pronoun usage. Applied linguists support the theory or prove otherwise with regard to practical implications. This dichotomy fully matches the way I study synonymy.

d) Microlinguistics and macrolinguistics

Macrolinguistics is a broad term covering all fields of language exploration, of a language as a whole. In contrast to macrolinguistics, microlinguistics is concerned with the narrow view. It examines a structure or one specific subfield of a language, which in this case is synonymy.

Synonymy belongs to descriptive linguistics, the synchronic approach, microlinguistics and theoretical or practical linguistics. It depends on the perspective we use to look at synonymy. Descriptive linguists assess synonymy on the basis of practical evidence, which is a key part of this thesis. The synchronic approach is used in choosing modern English as the source. Microlinguistics studies only a narrow view of the use of synonyms in special types of texts. Theoretical and applied linguistics are suitable approaches for studying synonymy. The theory of synonymy is as important as the practical part.

A characteristic feature of a vocabulary of any language is the existence of synonyms, which is closely connected with the problem of meaning of the word. The most complicated problem is the definition of the term "synonyms". There are a great many definitions of the term, but there is no universally accepted one. Traditionally the synonyms are defined as words different in sound-form, but identical or similar in meaning. But this definition has been severely criticized on many points.

MEANING

Meaning is the core of communication and the fundamental centre of understanding and linguistic encoding of information. There are many explanations of meaning, although there is no consensus regarding which one is correct. Without understanding the right meaning, a conversation would be misleading.

The meaning of a word is an image or concept which comes into our minds while listening to a word. Occasionally the image or association can be part of a meaning or can be attached wrongly. Hence, intuition is not sufficient evidence about the relation between words. The criteria for identifying synonymy and recognition of synonymy from other sense relations were listed in the chapter about lexical semantics.

Meaning is a crucial topic for the purposes of this work since synonymy is a kind of meaning relation between a set of lexemes. Synonymy and other relations are based on contrast or similarity between words. Many words do not have straight links to potential referents.

Each word has its own meaning but their combination in the sentence is complex. A meaning can be carried by small identifiable parts of a sentence or a whole sentence which carries the complex meaning. Cruse [3,15] calls these small parts carrying meaning ‘semantic constituents’ and the smallest indivisible parts ‘minimal semantic constituents’.

A projection of meaning is given by context. However, we have to take into account also meaning per se without context, the essential meaning. Nevertheless, a synonym without a context does not have much value since the context gives us the notion of right sense.

Kvetko contributes to the topic by dividing linguistic context and context of speech situation:

1) Linguistic context

a. Lexical context (collocative) is based on collocations, i.e. words generally used with other words or a group of words. Only a sentence is needed, not the whole situation. The collocative meaning is sometimes enough although it is not a requirement. The lexical context is essential for synonymy since the meaning is

carried by a lexical word, not grammatical, or it does not depend on the whole situation. This is clarified in the practical part.

b. Grammatical context (syntactical) is applied when grammatical structure, not lexical elements, is a determination for the meaning.

2) The context of speech situation depends on the whole situation. The sense is not recognized from a single sentence but just the one sentence without the physical context still offers more than one meaning.

The problem of synonymy is treated differently by Russian and foreign scientists. Among numerous definitions of the term in our linguistics the most comprehensive and full one is suggested by I.V. Arnold: "Synonyms - are two or more words of the same meaning, belonging to the same part of speech, possessing one or more identical meaning, interchangeable at least in some contexts without any considerable alteration in denotation meaning, but differing in morphemic composition, phonemic shape, shades of meaning, connotation, affective value, style, emotional coloring and valence peculiar to one of the elements in a synonymic group."

This definition describes the notion "synonymy", gives some criteria of synonymy (identity of meaning, interchangeability), shows some difference in connotation, emotive coloring, style, etc. But this descriptive definition as well as many others has the main drawbacks - there are no objective criteria of "identity" or "similarity" or sameness of meaning. They all are based on the linguistic intuitions of the scholars.

From the definition follows, that the members of the synonymic group in a dictionary should have their common denotational meaning and consequently it should be explained in the same words; they may have some differences in implication connotation, shades of meaning, idiomatic usage, etc.

Hope, expectation, anticipation are considered to be synonymous because they all mean " having smth in mind which is likely to happen..." But *expectation* may be either of good or of evil. *Anticipation* is as a rule an expectation of smth good. *Hope* is not only a belief but a desire that some event would happen. The

stylistic difference is also quite marked. The Romance words *anticipation* and *expectation* are formal literary words used only by educated speakers, whereas the native monosyllabic *hope* is stylistically neutral. Moreover, they differ in idiomatic usage. Only *hope* is possible in such set expressions as *to hope against hope, to lose hope, to pin one's hopes on smth.* Neither expectation nor anticipation could be substituted into the following quotation from T. Eliot: "You don't know what hope is until you have lost it".

Synonymy is used to mean 'sameness of meaning'. It is obvious that for the dictionary-maker many sets of words have the same meaning; they are synonymous, or are synonyms of one another. This makes it possible for them to define *gala* as *festivity* or *mavis* as *thrush* though there is little use in this method if neither word is known to the reader, e. g. if *hoatzin* is defined as *stink-bird;* or *neve* as *firn.* Of coursedictionaries seldom rely solely on synonymy, but add descriptive details to enlighten the reader.

It has often been suggested that English is particularly rich in synonyms for the historical reason that its vocabulary has come from two different sources, from Anglo-Saxon on the one hand and from French, Latin and Greek on the other. Since English is considered to be a Germanic language from a historical point of view, with Anglo-Saxon as an earlier stage of its development, the 'Anglo-Saxon' words are often considered to be 'native' while those from French, Latin or Greek are 'foreign', 'borrowed' from these languages. But the terms 'native' and 'foreign' are misleading. For whatever their origins, most of the words are an essential and wholly natural part of the English language; moreover, even some of the 'native' words may well have been 'borrowed' from some other language at some time in the more remote past. Unfortunately, there are often moves to remove the 'foreign' element from languages. Frenchmen deplore 'Franglais' (the English words that are now common in colloquial French), while the Welsh spend time and scholarship to find substitutes for the 'English' words in the language, though they are quite happy to retain the 'Latin' words that entered an earlier form of the language at the time of the Roman Empire.

Nevertheless, it is true that there are pairs of 'native' and 'foreign' words. Thus we have *brotherly* and *fraternal, buy* and *purchase, world* and *universe,* and many others. The 'native' words are often shorter and less learned, four-letter words (in the quite literal sense) are mostly from Anglo-Saxon. There are examples too of triples, one 'native', one from French, one directly from Latin - *kingly, royal, regal* (though with this set it is the word of French origin, *royal,* that is today in more common usage).

It can, however, be maintained that there are no real synonyms, that no two words have exactly the same meaning. Indeed it would seem unlikely that two words with exactly the same meaning would both survive in a language. If we look at possible synonyms there are at least five ways in which they can be seen to differ:

First, some sets of synonyms belong to different dialects of the language. For instance, the term *fall is* used in the United States and in some western counties of Britain where others would use *autumn.* The works of dialectologists are full of examples like these. They are especially interested in the words to do with farming; depending where you live you will say *cowshed, cowhouse* or *byre, haystack, hayrick* or *haymow.* Even the domestic *tap* is either a *faucet* or a *spigot* in most of the United States. But these groups of words are of no interest at all for semantics. Their status is no different from the translation-equivalents of, say, English and French. It is simply a matter of people speaking different forms of the language having different vocabulary items.

Secondly, there is a similar situation, but a more problematic one, with the words that are used in different 'styles' or 'registers'. *A nasty smell* might be, in the appropriate setting, an *obnoxious effluvium* or *an 'orrible stink.* The former is, of course, jocularly very 'posh', and the latter colloquial. Similar trios (though not with quite the same stylistic characteristics, but differing rather in degrees of formality) are *gentleman, man* and *chap, pass away, die* and *pop off.* These are more difficult to deal with because there is a far less clear distinction between the styles than between the geographically defined dialects. We do not normally pass

from one dialect to another, but we can within a single conversation change our style, and in particular, can change the vocabulary items to achieve different effects. The problem is, then, whether a change of style should be treated as a change from one 'language' to another or a change within a single language. If the former, then stylistic synonyms are of no more interest than the dialectal synonyms or equivalent words in English or French. If the latter, we have to say that stylistic differences can be semantic. There is some plausibility in the view that, if we switch from style to style to achieve effect, this is a semantic, feature. But there is a major objection to this. In changing style we may change not only the vocabulary, but also the grammar and the phonology, and it is difficult to incorporate stylistic differences as part of a phonological or grammatical system. It is simpler to handle them in terms of different but related 'languages', like the dialects. If this is applied to stylistic synonyms we shall not include them within semantics, but leave style as a matter for a separate investigation.

Thirdly, as we saw in, some words may be said to differ only in their emotive or evaluative meanings. The remainder of their meaning, their 'cognitive' meaning, remains the same. Examples were *statesman / polilician, hide/conceal;* a further trio is *thrifty, economical, stingy.* Such words are often discussed in detail in books on semantics. They are, of course, interesting in the way in which they are used for persuading or influencing others, for propaganda, etc. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to attempt to separate such emotive or evaluative meaning from the 'basic' 'cognitive' meaning of words for five reasons:

First, as we have already argued, it is not easy to establish precisely what cognitive meaning is, and certainly not reasonable to attempt to define such meaning in terms of reference physical properties. In particular we should notice that in this sense many verbs and adjectives will have little or no cognitive meaning.

Secondly, there are words in English that are used *purely* for evaluative purposes, most obviously the adjectives *good* and *bad,* but it is not normally

assumed that they have no cognitive meaning. Such words are of interest to moral philosophers, but should not, I believe, have any special place in linguistics.

Thirdly, we make all kinds of judgments and do not merely judge in terms of 'good' and 'bad'. We judge size and use the appropriate terms -*giant/dwarf, mountain/hill,* etc., and we make other kinds of judgments in our choice of words. The meaning of words is not simply a matter of 'objective' facts; a great deal of it is 'subjective' and we cannot clearly distinguish between the two.

Fourthly, *some* words are collocationally restricted i. e they occur only in conjunction with other words. Thus *rancid* occurs with *bacon* or *butter, addled* with *eggs* or *brains.* This does not seem to be a matter of their meaning, but of the company they keep. It could, perhaps, be argued that these are true synonyms - differing only in that they occur in different environments. But, on the other hand, as we shall see shortly, some scholars have actually thought that the test of synonyms is whether they occur in identical environments!

Fifthly, it is obviously the case that many words are close in meaning, or that their meanings overlap. There is, that is to say, a loose sense of synonymy. This is the kind of synonymy, that is exploited by the dictionary maker. For *mature* (adjective), for instance, possible synonyms are *adult, ripe, perfect, due.* For *govern* we may suggest *direct, control, determine, require,* while *loose* (adjective) will have an even larger set - *inexact, free, relaxed, vague, lax, unbound, inattentive, slack,* etc. If we look for the synonyms for each of these words themselves, we shall have a further set for each and shall, of course, get further and further away from the meaning of the original word. Dictionaries, unfortunately (except the very large ones), tell us little about the connections between words and their defining synonyms or between the synonyms themselves.

It would be useful if we had some way of testing synonymy. One way, perhaps, is substitutions-substituting one word for another. It has been suggested that true or total synonyms are mutually interchangeable in all their environments. But it is almost certainly the case that there are no total synonyms in this sense; indeed this would seem to be a corollary of the belief that no two words have

exactly the same meaning. What we shall find, of course, is that some words are interchangeable in certain environments only, e. g. that *deep* or *profound* may be used with *sympathy* but only *deep* with *water,* that a *road* may be *broad* or *wide* but an *accent* only *broad.*But this will give us little measure of synonymy or of similarity of meaning; it will merely indicate the collocational possibilities, and these do not seem necessarily to be always closely related to nearness of meaning. Finally, we must consider the term for 'connotation', for synonyms are often said to differ only in their connotations. This is not, in my view, a very useful term. It often refers to emotive or evaluative meaning, which I have argued is not usefully distinguished from cognitive meaning. It is also used to refer to stylistic or even dialectal differences or even to the small differences that are found in near-synonyms. But there is a further rather interesting use. It is sometimes suggested that words become associated with certain characteristics of the items to which they refer. Thus *woman* has the connotation 'weak' and *pig* the connotation 'dirty'. Such connotations were the subject of Osgood's investigations. Strictly, however, this is not a matter of the meaning of words or even of meaning in general. It rather indicates that people (or some people) believe that women are weak and pigs dirty. It is true that people will change names in order to avoid such connotations, and there is a natural process of change with taboo words. Because the word is associated with a socially distasteful subject, it becomes distasteful itself, and another word, a 'euphemism' takes its place. But the process is, of course, unending since it is essentially the object and not the word that is unpleasant.

There are two phenomena that are sometimes handled under synonymy that have not yet been considered in this section. The first is context-dependent synonymy where two items appear to be synonymous in a particular context. Examples (taken from J. Lyons) are *dog* and *bitch* in *My - has just had pups* and *buy* and *get* in *I'llgo to the shop and - some bread.* But this does not seem to be an argument for the synonymy of the words. On the contrary they are related in terms of hyponymy, one term being more specific than the other. The context, however, supplies the specific information that is lacking in one of the examples - having

pups indicates that dog is female, going to the shop suggests that the bread is to be bought. But this is not part of the meaning. The dog might not be female (remarkable though it would be), and we might steal the bread. The fact that information can be gleaned from the context does not affect the meaning of items. For consider *the book* and *the red book.* These could well be contextually synonymous (if we had already mentioned a red book - or, non-linguistically, if there was one, red, book before us). Yet we should not wish to say that these have the same meaning. The second kind of 'synonymy'is that between *bull* and *male adult bovine animal.* The test of interchangeability would rule these out completely as synonymous, for one would hardly say *There is a male bovine animal in the field,* even though in some sense the two items seem to have the same meaning. But this is not a 'natural' linguistic phenomenon; it is created by the linguist or lexicographer for the purposes of definition and paraphrase. It relates, moreover, more to componential analysis than to synonymy.

Not a single definition of the term *synonym* provides for any objective criterion of similarity or sameness of meaning as far as it is based on the linguistic intuition of the scholars.

Many scholars defined *synonyms* as words conveying the same notion but differing either in shades of meaning or in stylistic characteristics. In "Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms" its authors used the semantic criterion along with the criterion of interchangeability, which we may see from the definition.

A synonym is one of two or more words which have the same or nearly the same essential (denotational) meaning. It is not a matter of mere likeness in meaning, but a likeness in denotation which may be expressed in its definition. The definition must indicate the part of speech and the relations of the ideas involved in a term's meaning.

Synonyms, therefore, are only such words as may be defined wholly or almost wholly in the same terms. Usually, they are distinguished from one another by an added implication or connotation, or may differ in their idiomatic use or in their implication.

They usually are interchangeable within limits, but interchangeability is not the final test, since idiomatic usage is often a preventive of that. The only satisfactory test of synonyms is their agreement in connotation.

The English word-stock is extremely rich in synonyms, which can be largely accounted for by abundant borrowing. The synonymic resources of a language tend to form certain characteristic and fairly consistent patterns. Synonyms in English are organized according to 2 basic principles. One of them involves double, the other a triple scale. In English there are countless pairs of synonyms where a native term is opposed to one borrowed from French, Latin, and Greek. In most cases the native word is more spontaneous, more informal and unpretentious whereas the foreign one often has a learned, abstract air. They may also have emotive differences: the Saxon word is apt to be wanner and homelier than its foreign counterpart. The native words are usually colloquial. We quote a few examples of synonymic patterns double scale.

Adjectives: bodily - corporal, brotherly - fraternal, heavenly - celestial, inner - internal, learned - erudite, sharp - acute.

Nouns: fiddle - violin, friendship - amity, help - aid, wire - telegram, world - universe.

Verbs: answer - reply, read - peruse, buy - purchase.

Side-by-side with this main pattern there exists in English a pattern based on a triple scale of synonyms:

NATIVE	FROM FRENCH	FROM LATIN
to ask	to question	to interrogate
belly	stomach	abdomen
to end	finish	complete
to gather	to assemble	collect
to rise	to mount	to ascent
teaching	guidance	instruction

The infiltration of British English by Americanisms also results in the formation of synonyms pairs, one being a traditional Briticism and the other - a new American loan: Leader - editorial; autumn - fall; government - administration; luggage - baggage; wireless -radio; lorry - truck; tin - can; long distance (telephone) call - trunk call; stone - rock; team -squad.

In a few cases the American synonym has a higher frequency than its British counterpart as in the pair: commuter - a season ticket holder (Br.). Very often 2 synonyms differ stylistically. Br. Synonym is stylistically neutral while the Americanism is stylistically marked (usually as colloquial or slang): intellectual - egghead excuse - alibi angry - mad averse - allergic.

English also used many pairs of synonymous derivatives, the one Hellenic and the other Romance: hypotheses - supposition periphery - circumference sympathy - compassion synthesis - composition.

Another source of synonymy is the so-called euphemism, when a harsh word indelicate or unpleasant or least inoffensive connotation. Thus the denotational meaning of drunk and merry may be the same. The euphemistic expression merry coincides in denotation with the word it substituted but the connotation of the latter faded out and so the utterance on the whole is milder and less offensive.

Aroma usually adds to odor the implication of a penetrating, pervasive or sometimes a pungent quality; it need not imply delicacy or fragrance, but it seldom connotes unpleasantness, and it often suggests smth. to be savored.

Understand, comprehend, appreciate are synonyms when they mean to have a clear and true idea or conception, or full and exact knowledge, of smth. They (especially the first two) are often used interchangeably and seemingly without loss; nevertheless, they are distinguishable by fine sharp differences in meaning in precise use. In general, it may be said that understand refers to the result of a mental process, comprehend to the mental process of arriving at such a result; thus one may come to understand a person although one has had difficulty in comprehending his motives and his peculiarities; one may be unable to comprehend a poem, no matter how clearly one understands every sentence in it.

"You begin to *comprehend* me, do you" cried he, turning towards her. "Oh! Yes - I *understand* you perfectly." Sometimes the difference is more subtle; comprehend implies the mental act of grasping or seizing clearly and fully; understand, the power to receive and register a clear and true impression. "That ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to *comprehend* with all saints what is the breadth, length, depth, height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge". "Some men can think of thousands of dollars, others have to think of hundreds. It's all their minds are big enough to *comprehend."* "And the piece of God, which passeth all *understanding,* shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus". "Charters is so crowded that one must be content to fell what one can, and let the rest go. *Understand,*we cannot." Appreciate, as here considered, implies a just judgment or the estimation of a thing's true or exact value; therefore, the word is used in reference to persons or things which may be undervaluing or overvaluing. "You are of an age now to *appreciate* his character." "We do not reproach him for preffering, apparently, Euripides to Aeschylus. But he should at least *appreciate* Euripides". "The public opinion which thus magnifies patriotism into a religion is a force of which it is difficult to *appreciate* the strength." "To *appreciate* the gulf between the ideal and the fact, we have only to contrast such a scheme as that set forth in the "Republic" of Plato with the following description of the state of Greece during the Peloponnesian War".

Synonymy is one of the most difficult and controversial problems, and the most controversial point is the problem of criteria of synonymy and the definition of synonyms.

Traditional linguistics solved the problem with the notional criterion and defined synonyms as words of the same part of speech conveying the same notion but differing either in shades of meaning or in stylistic characteristics.

Some aspects of this definition have been criticised. It has been pointed out that linguistic phenomena should be defined in linguistic terms and the term «notion» makes this an extralinguistic definition.

In contemporary linguistics the semantic criterion of synonymy is frequently used. In terms of componental analysis synonyms may be defined as words with the same or nearly the same denotation (or the denotative components) but differing in connotations (in emotive charge or in stylistic characteristics).

to begin - to start - to commence (stylistic reference),

to put - to place - to lay - to set - to deposite (shades of meaning),

to tremble - to shiver - to shudder (shades of meaning),

to like - to admire - to love (emotive charge).

The verbs *to like - to admire - to love* describe feelings of attraction, fondness, but each of them describes it in its own way:

to like - certain warm feeling;

to admire - a stronger emotive charge;

to love - the strongest feeling.

denotation   connotations

to like - to like (warm feeling)

to admire - to like (warmer feeling)

to love - to like (the strongest possible emotion)

to stare - tolook (lastingly, in surprise, curiosity)

to gaze - to look (lastingly, in admiration, wonder)

to glare - to look (lastingly, in anger, fury)

to glance - to look (briefly, in passing)

to peep - to look (lastingly, stealingly through an opening or from a concealed location)

to peer - to look (lastingly, with difficulty or strain)

The common denotation convincingly shows that according to the semantic criterion, these words are synonyms. The connotative components are different.

to look

to glance - to look quickly, suddenly,

to glimpse - to look still quicker, to have a momentary look.

In great number of cases the semantic difference between two or more synonyms is supported by the difference in their valency, syntactical or lexical. Valency denotes the combining power or typical co-occurrence of a linguistic element.

to tremble - *to shiver* from cold, *to shudder* from disgust;

high tree - *tall* man;

beautiful woman - *handsome* man;

to answer a question - *to reply* to a question;

to say something to somebody - *to tell* somebody;

to finish school - *to graduate* from university;

to offer a concrete thing - *to suggest* an idea: going; that he go.

Concerning synonymy, I have mostly identified with Cruse's [3,97] distribution of sources of variation among propositional synonyms. He puts on one side varieties associated with different typical features of language users, such as age, social status or region. On the other side are three dimensions of variations connected to register, i.e. field, mode and style.

The first category contains dialect, regionalism, slang, jargon, and professionalism. Dialect variants are geographical, temporal, and social. The English language is used in many countries in the world (The United Kingdom, The United States, Australia, Canada, etc.) and as a consequence of that the variants of the language are divergent. The English language is an important language in many other countries of Africa, America and Europe so the regional variations increase. There are variations of spelling, pronunciation and grammar. The most extended varieties of English are British English and American English. These are varieties important for Czech students because British English is typically taught in Czech schools and American English is everywhere around us, e.g. on commercials or TV and the phrases are adopted into the language of Czech people. The biggest differences between British and American English are in the pronunciation and the vocabulary, but spelling and grammar differ as well. The differences in academic prose are negligible, while fiction is a rich source of

dissimilarities. I do not expect to find dialect differences in my practical part because I deal with British authors.

Another source of synonymy dependent on the age of language users is slang. Slang words are expressive, substandard words typical for speakers belonging to a group of people with the same interests or the same profession. Slang words are usually ironical, cynical, impolite or vulgar with the aim to lighten or ridicule the topic. Slang words are generally used for a period of time and are subsequently replaced with new ones. Well known slang words are for money (e.g. *dough, loot, brass*) or for alcohol (e.g. *booze*). Many slang words become a part of everyday vocabulary. If they become part of standard English, it is an enrichment of the language and its vocabulary.

Arnold [1,250] divides slang into subdivisions of general and special slang. The subdivision is according to usage of words. General slang words are not specific for a particular social or professional group. On the other hand, special slang words are typical for any social group (e.g. according to age, common interest or social status) or a professional group (e.g. military slang, university slang, medical slang). Social groups may be, for example, teenagers, retired people, musicians, actors, working class or upper class. Professional vocabulary is called jargon. Argot is typically regarded as a single category which is used by the lowest social groups, e.g. criminals, drug users. The aim of using argot is to hide the meaning of utterances.

The second category presented by Cruse [8] includes field, mode and style. Field comprises many fields of discourse, including the language of science, which I expect to find in texts of academic prose. Fields of discourse have lexical and grammatical characteristics for groups with special vocabulary, e.g. medical, ecclesiastical, and political or business discourse. Scientific discourse uses borrowed words, especially from Latin and Greek, and it is the same for the worldwide academic community which is important for our purposes of synonymy.

The style also corresponds with formality/informality. Formal vocabulary is used in an official situation or official documents requiring a higher level of

expression, typically to be understood by the general public. Formal statements are mostly written; nevertheless, could also refer to academic lectures. Many formal words have their origin in French, Latin or Greek. They occur especially in scientific vocabulary, business (economic) vocabulary or state affairs. Formal archaic expressions are to be found in literature, especially poetry. Informal vocabulary is used in everyday communication in personal or everyday affairs. Many formal words have synonyms which are either neutral or informal words. Individual informal vocabulary depends on the social situation and location people come from. Original native language is usually full of informal words, such as phrasal verbs, idioms and slang words. Typical everyday vocabulary includes substandard words, for example slang words or something referred to as 'grammatical vulgarism' like the expression *wanna*, i.e. want to. Slang words are used very frequently within groups connected by social status or age. Very close to slang is jargon that is used in professional terminology. One more well-known group of informal words is argot, vocabulary created for secrecy, used especially by criminals. It is not exceptional that some words from these groups become neutral words used by the general public when replacing old expressions.

Emotional colouring is not unusual. Conversely, this type is encountered on a daily basis by speakers. The speaker uses an emotionally coloured word to show their attitude or opinion on a subject and their relation to the listener. There are factors which reflect in the tone and also in the meaning of used words. We differentiate emotionally marked (coloured) and emotionally neutral words. The first mentioned type expressing anger, fury, joy, happiness, surprise, excitement, fear, etc. result from the expressive mode of the speaker. Kvetko [13,26] states 4-four types of emotional colouring – positive, negative, permanent and occasional. Positive and negative colouring of language expresses attitude and humour. Permanent and occasional colouring depends on the frequency of the speaker's attitudes and context. Emotional colouring occurs often so it would be no surprise to find these words in prose.

As we have already seen, the English word ‘meaning’ is rather vague. One important distinction we can make within the general notion of a lexeme’s meaning is between its sense and its referent (or reference). To simplify the introduction of these terms, we will confi ne our discussion to nouns; we will see in how they apply to other lexical categories.

The sense of a lexeme may be defined as the *general meaning* or the *concept* underlying the word. As a first approximation, we can describe this as what we usually think of as contained in a dictionary entry for the word in question, although we will see later that this characterization needs significant modification. The notion of sense can be made more explicit through contrast with the category of referent. A word’s referent is the object which it stands for on a specific occasion of use. For example, consider :

The queen has fallen off the table.

If I am talking about a rowdy evening at Buckingham Palace in 2009, the referent of the word *queen* is Her Majesty, Elizabeth II, and the referent of the word *table* is a particular piece of English royal furniture. But if I am talking not bout Elizabeth II but about Queen Margrethe of Denmark, the words *queen* and *table* have different referents: not Elizabeth II and the English piece of furniture, but Margrethe and the Danish one. On each of the occasions is uttered, there is one and only one referent of each word.

A word’s referent, then, is the particular thing, person, place, etc. which an expression stands for on a particular occasion of use, and it changes each time the word is applied to a different object or situation in the world. By contrast, a word’s sense does not change every time the word takes on a new referent. Regardless of whether the referent of queen is Elizabeth II or Margrethe, its sense is something like ‘female reigning monarch’. This is not to say, however, that ‘female reigning monarch’ is the only sense of the word queen.

Another sense of queen is ‘second highest ranking piece in a game of chess’. This would be the sense involved if I uttered while talking about a game of chess in the café, where queen would refer to a particular chess piece. Yet another sense

of the word queen is ‘third highest card in a suit, behind ace and king’: this would be the sense involved if I uttered in reference to a game of bridge at the kitchen table. In these two cases, queen does not only have two new different referents, the particular chess piece and the particular card, but two new different senses as well: ‘second highest ranking piece in a game of chess’ and ‘third highest card in a suit, behind ace and king’. In all the utterances of, by contrast, ‘table’ has the single sense ‘piece of furniture with raised flat surface used for putting things on, eating at, etc. Obviously, words like queen and table stand for many different people and objects in the world: they have, in other words, many different referents.

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