

MODERN ENGLISH LEXICOLOGY

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Lexicology is a branch of linguistics, the science of language. The term Lexicology is composed of two Greek morphemes: *lexis* meaning ‘word, phrase’ (hence *lexicos* ‘having to do with words’) and *logos* which denotes ‘learning, a department of knowledge’. Thus, the literal meaning of the term Lexicology is ‘the science of the word’.

The literal meaning, however, gives only a general notion of the aims and the subject-matter of this branch of linguistic science, since all its other branches also take account of words in one way or another approaching them from different angles. Phonetics, for instance, investigating the phonetic structure of language, i.e. its system of phonemes and intonation patterns, is concerned with the study of the outer sound form of the word.

Grammar, which is inseparably bound up with Lexicology, is the study of the grammatical structure of language. It is concerned with the various means of expressing grammatical relations between words and with the patterns after which words are combined into word-groups and sentences.

Lexicology as a branch of linguistics has its own aims and methods of scientific research, its basic task being a study and systematic description of vocabulary in respect to its origin, development and current use. Lexicology is concerned with words, variable word-groups, phraseological units, and with morphemes which make up words.

Distinction is naturally made between General Lexicology and Special Lexicology. General Lexicology is part of General Linguistics; it is concerned with the study of vocabulary irrespective of the specific features of any particular language. Special Lexicology is the Lexicology of a particular language (e.g. English, Russian, etc.), i.e. the study and description of its vocabulary and vocabulary units, primarily words as the main units of language. Needless to say, that every Special Lexicology is based on the principles worked out and laid down by General Lexicology, a general theory of vocabulary.

There is also a close relationship between Lexicology and Stylistics or, to be more exact, Linguistic Stylistics. Linguo-Stylistics is concerned with the study of the nature, functions and structure of stylistic devices, on the one hand, and with the investigation of each style of language, on the other, i.e. with its aim, its structure, its characteristic features and the effect it produces as well as its interrelation with the other styles of language. There are two principal approaches in linguistic science to the study of language material, namely the synchronic (Gr. *syn* — ‘together, with’ and *Chronos* — ‘time’) and the diachronic (Gr. *dia* — ‘through’)

approach. With regard to Special Lexicology the synchronic approach is concerned with the vocabulary of a language as it exists at a given time, for instance, at the present time. It is special

Descriptive Lexicology that deals with the vocabulary and

vocabulary units of a particular language at a certain time. A Course in Modern English Lexicology is therefore a course in Special Descriptive Lexicology, its object of study being the English vocabulary as it exists at the present time. The diachronic approach in terms of Special Lexicology deals with the changes and the development of vocabulary in the course of time. It is special Historical Lexicology that deals with the evolution of the vocabulary units of a language as time goes by. An English Historical Lexicology would be concerned, therefore, with the origin of English vocabulary units, their change and development, the linguistic and extralinguistic factors modifying their structure, meaning and usage within the history of the English language. It should be emphatically stressed that the distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic study is merely a difference of approach separating for the purposes of investigation what in real language is inseparable. The two approaches should not be contrasted, or set one against the

other; in fact, they are intrinsically interconnected and interdependent: every linguistic structure and system actually exists in a state of constant development so that the synchronic state of a language system is a result of a long process of linguistic evolution, of its historical development. A good example illustrating both the distinction between the two approaches and their interconnection is furnished by the words to beg and beggar.

Synchronically, the words to beg and beggar are related as a simple and a derived word, the noun beggar being the derived member of the pair, for the derivative correlation between the two is the same as in the case of to sing — singer, to teach — teacher, etc. When we approach the problem diachronically, however, we learn that the noun beggar was borrowed from Old French and only presumed to have been derived from a shorter word, namely the verb to beg, as in the English language agent nouns are commonly derived from verbs with the help of the agent suffix -er.

Closely connected with Historical Lexicology is Contrastive and Comparative Lexicology whose aims are to study the correlation between the vocabularies of two or more languages, and find out the correspondences between the vocabulary units of the languages under comparison. Needless to say, one can hardly overestimate the importance of Contrastive Lexicology as well as of Comparative Linguistics in general for the purpose of class-room teaching of foreign languages. Of primary importance in this respect is the comparison of the foreign language with the mother tongue. It is a matter of common knowledge that the vocabulary of any language is never stable, never static, but is constantly changing, growing and decaying. The changes in the vocabulary of a language are due both to linguistic and extralinguistic causes or to a combination of both. The extralinguistic causes are determined by the social nature of the language. In this respect there is a tremendous difference between Lexicology, on the one hand, and Phonology, Morphology and Syntax, on the other. Words, to a far greater degree than sounds, grammatical forms, or syntactical arrangements, are subject to change, for the word stock of a language directly and immediately reacts to changes in social life, to whatever happens in the life of the speech community in question. To illustrate the immediate connection between the development of vocabulary and the extra-linguistic causes a few examples will suffice. The intense development of science and technology has lately given birth to a great number of new words such as computer, cyclotron, radar, psycholinguistics, etc.; the conquest and research of outer space started by the Soviet people contributed words like sputnik, lunokhod,

babymoon, moon-car, spaceship, etc. It is significant that the suffix -nik occurring in the noun sputnik is freely applied to new words of various kinds, e.g. flopnik, mousenik, woofnik, etc.

The factor of the social need also manifests itself in the mechanism of word-formation. Among the adjectives with the suffix -y derived from noun stems denoting fabrics (cf. silky, velvety,

woolly, etc.) the adjective tweedy stands out as meaning not merely resembling or like tweed but rather 'of sports style'. It is used to describe the type of appearance (or style of clothes) which is characteristic of a definite social group, namely people going in for country sports. Thus, the adjective tweedy in this meaning defines a notion which is specific for the speech community in question and is, therefore, sociolinguistically conditioned. From the above-adduced examples it follows that in contrast with Phonology, Morphology and Syntax, Lexicology is essentially a sociolinguistic science. The lexicologist should always take into account correlations between purely linguistic facts and the underlying social facts which brought them into existence, his research should be based on establishing scientifically grounded interrelation and points of contact which have come into existence between the language and the social life of the speech community in question. It was pointed out above that Lexicology studies various lexical units: morphemes, words, variable word-groups and phraseological units. We proceed from the assumption that the word is the basic unit of language system, the largest on the morphologic and the smallest on the syntactic plane of linguistic analysis. The word is a structural and semantic entity within the language

system. It should be pointed out that there is another approach to the concept of

the basic language unit. The criticism of this viewpoint cannot be discussed within the framework of the present study. Suffice it to say that here we consistently proceed from the concept of the word as the basic unit in all the branches of Lexicology. Both words and phraseological units are names for things, namely the names of actions, objects, qualities, etc. To illustrate, the lexical or to be more exact the vocabulary units *tattle*, *wall*, *taxi* are words denoting various objects of the outer world; the vocabulary units *black frost*, *red tape*, *a skeleton in the cupboard* are phraseological units: each is a word-group with a specialised meaning of the whole, namely *black frost* is 'frost without snow or rime', *red tape* denotes bureaucratic methods, *a skeleton in the cupboard* refers to a fact of which a family is ashamed and which it tries to hide. The word as well as any linguistic sign is a two-facet unit possessing both form and content or, to be more exact, sound form and meaning. Neither can exist without the other. For example, [θɪmbəl] is a word within the framework of the English language primarily because it has the lexical meaning — 'a small cap of metal, plastic, etc. worn on the finger in sewing. and the grammatical meaning of the Common case, singular. In other languages it is not a word, but a meaningless sound-cluster. When used in actual speech the word undergoes certain modification and functions in one of its forms.

The system showing a word in all its word-forms is called its paradigm. The lexical meaning of a word is the same throughout the paradigm, i.e. all the word-forms of one and the same word are lexically identical. The grammatical meaning varies from one form to another (to take, takes, took, taking or singer, singer's, singers, singers'). Therefore, when we speak of the word *singer* or the word *take* as used in actual utterances (cf., *His brother is a well-known singer* or *I wonder who has*

taken my umbrella) we use the term *w o r d* conventionally, because what is manifested in the speech event is not the word as a whole but one of its forms which is identified as belonging to one definite paradigm. There are two approaches to the paradigm: (a) as a system of forms of one word it reveals the differences and relationships between them; (b) in abstraction from concrete words it is treated as a pattern on which every word of one part of speech models its forms, thus serving to distinguish one part of speech from another. Cf. the noun paradigm — (), -'s, -

s, -s' as distinct from that of the regular verb — (), -s, -ed1, -ed2, -Ing. Besides the grammatical forms of words, i.e. word-forms, some scholars distinguish lexical varieties which they term *variety of the word*. Distinction is made between two basic groups of variants of words.

In actual speech a word or to be more exact a polysemantic word is used in, one of its meanings. Such a word in one of its meanings is described as lexico-semantic variant. Thus, Group One comprises lexicosemantic variants, i.e. polysemantic words in each of their meanings, as exemplified by the meaning of the verb to learn in word-groups like to learn at school, cf. to learn about (of) smith, etc. Group Two comprises phonetic and morphological variants. As examples of phonetic variants, the pronouncing variants of the adverbs often and again can be given, cf. [‘o:fn] and [‘o:ftən], [ə’gein] and [ə’gen]. The two variant forms of the past indefinite tense of verbs like to learn illustrate morphological variants, cf. learned [-d] and learnt [-t]. Parallel formations of the geologic — geological, phonetic — phonetical type also enter the group of morphological variants. It may be easily observed that the most essential feature of variants of words of both groups is that a slight change in the morphemic or phonemic composition of a word is not connected with any modification of its meaning and, vice versa, a change in meaning is not followed by any structural changes, either morphemic or phonetic. Like word-forms variants of words are identified in the process of communication as making up one and the same word. Thus, within the language system the word exists as a system and unity of all its forms and variants.

გამოყენებული ლიტერატურა:

1. Introduction — A. A. Sankin (2002)
2. Varieties of English — G. Y. Knyaseva (1999)
3. Semasiology — R. S. Ginzburg (2020)
4. Word-Groups and Phraseological Units — R. S. Ginzburg (1996)
5. Word-Structure — S. S. Khidekel and A. A. Sankin (2000)

RESUME

Modern English Lexicology as a subject of study forms part of the Theoretical Course of Modern English and as such is inseparable from its other component parts, i.e. Grammar, Phonetics, Stylistics, on the one hand, and the Course of History of the English Language, on the other. The language learner will find the Course of Modern English Lexicology of great practical importance. He will obtain much valuable information concerning the English word stock and the laws and regulations governing the formation and usage of English words and word-groups. Besides, the Course is aimed both at summarising the practical material already familiar to the students from foreign language classes and at helping the students to develop the skills and habits of generalising the linguistic phenomena observed.