

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Importance of Semantic Signs Theory in Determining the Degree of Compatibility of Languages

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Abstract

Comparative component analysis based on semantic features has long been a common method in contrastive lexical-semantic studies. Comparative component analysis of the content of lexical units of two languages consists in separating the meanings of these units into semantic features and determining which of their semantic features coincide and which differ.

KEY WORDS

Phonology, morphology, semasiology, contrastive linguistics, lexical-semantic fields, semantic sign theory.

INTRODUCTION

The theory of semantic signs is based on the transfer of phonological and morphological structural methods to the analysis of the content of lexical-semantic units of the language. However, the specific features of the lexical-semantic level do not allow for the full and consistent use of these methods. Analysis of the meaning of a word using binary oppositions usually covers only the main, central semantic components, while other multifaceted signs are difficult to describe dichotomously (for example, it is difficult to separate the meaning of the word "red" from the word "green" or the meaning of the word "apple" from the word "pea"). The experience of using the theory to specifically describe lexical units of different languages shows that only certain thematic groups, such as "kinship terms", "names of geometric figures", can be successfully studied using the component analysis method. It is very difficult to apply this method to many abstract words, auxiliary words, and groups of numbers.

In Gudavichyus's monograph "Comparative Semasiology of Lithuanian and Russian Languages", the principles of semantic analysis are consistently used to compare lexical units. At the

level of lexical units, the author, on the one hand, analyzes the semantic composition of the meanings of individual lexical units, and on the other hand, makes a general comparison of the semantic structures of alternative words.

Thus, if we consider the semantic set obtained as a result of dividing the meaning of words into elementary meanings as universal, then from the point of view of semantic sign theory, equivalent lexical units are units that have equal or, at least, very similar semantic content in two languages.

At the same time, the most important issue for the theory of contrastive linguistics is the question of whether a set of semantic signs can be considered a universal basis for comparison. "A universal set of semantic signs (compare with a universal set of phonological differential signs) may be a standard for comparing language units, but such a set has not yet been found or created" [Mednikova 1985: 7].

In recent years, scholars have increasingly come to the conclusion that it is in principle impossible to create a set of semantic symbols as a universal basis [Lüdi 1985: 88]. Among

the important arguments presented in various works, the following can be cited:

1. There are no clear and fully formed rules for dividing the meanings of lexical units into semantic signs.
2. It is unlikely that any lexical unit of any language can be completely separated into semantic components.
3. There is no reason to assume that the resulting elementary meanings and the formal combinatorics rules that create meaning on their basis are universal and independent of the characteristics of language and culture.
4. The component analysis of the meaning of a word creates an intensional definition of the class of existence, which is incompatible with its extensional one.
5. The basic type of semantics is a continuous system, not a discrete system [Lyons 1977: 331, 1991: 16].

However, the concept of semantic sign should not be completely rejected. The only question is in what form, to what extent, and for what research purposes this hypothesis should be used.

Semantic field theory. The hypothesis of the existence of a semantic field was put forward by Y. Trier [Trier 1931]: the lexical composition of a language does not consist of separate isolated lexicons, but forms a system of words that are interconnected. This connection is so close that a change in the meaning of one lexicon causes corresponding changes in the meanings of other closely related lexicons. The scientist came to this conclusion based on a comparison of German dictionaries of the 1200s and 1300s related to the "conceptual field of consciousness" (the words *wisseit*, *list*, *kunst*, and *wizzen*). The development of the meaning of a word, as shown by Trier, causes a restructuring of the entire semantic field, which leads to the disappearance of some lexical units, the emergence of others, and a redistribution of meanings between words. As we have seen, the researcher's approach to analyzing the content of lexical units can be largely called a structuralist approach, since according to his understanding, the semantic field is not a set of lexical units of the language, but a complex and ordered unity.

Later, Trier's main idea and the term "field" became widespread in lexico-semantic and grammatical studies. Along with the diachronic analysis aspect proposed by the author, the "field approach" is also successfully used in modern comparative studies.

Y.N. Karaulov, discussing the possibilities of a unified description of the lexical-semantic field across languages, emphasizes the need to distinguish units of comparison at this level and suggests two options for solving this problem. The first is that a unified description unit of the lexicon can be an "elementary meaning"; a systematized set of such meanings serves as a universal standard for describing the vocabulary of the world's languages. However, there is also a second, alternative option - the description unit is a group of words covering a certain section of the dictionary, called a "semantic field" [Karaulov 1976: 314]. Karaulov's work presents an analysis of studies conducted on the material of different languages based on the field approach.

Currently, the lexical system of a language is usually conceived as a set of lexical-semantic fields related to a common concept. The words of each language are organized in a certain way into lexical-semantic fields, but they express a common semantic continuum.

It is clear that within the framework of semantic field theory, the basis for comparing the lexicon of two languages is the basic concept of a group of words united within a field.

The further development of this theory was the application of modern structural semantics methods to the study of the structure of the semantic field, a direction characteristic of the Tübingen school of semantics, founded in the 1960s by E. Koseriu. The internal organization of the field is considered to be two-level: the components that make up the semantic field and operate in it are lexical units, which in turn contain semantic distinguishing signs called *semes*. According to Koseriu's concept, *semes* are the minimum distinguishing signs that are distinguished within a certain lexical field and serve to structure it and connect it with other lexical fields. Then the semantic (word) field "structurally corresponds to the lexical paradigm in segmenting different parts of the language, these segments correspond to certain words in the language. These segments are opposed to each other on the basis of signs that distinguish words from a certain literal meaning" [Koseriyu 1969: 95]. Among the main constituent elements of the semantic field, an important place is occupied by the *archilexime* - this is a lexical unit that corresponds to the content of the entire semantic field.

An *archilexime* may be realized as a lexical unit in a given language, but for some vocabulary fields there may not be an *archilexicmatic* word. The concept of an *archilexime* is central to comparing the semantic fields of two languages, because it

expresses the basic concept of a group of words within a field.

Many works have been written on the basis of two approaches - component analysis and field structure - analyzing the meanings of certain lexical-semantic groups of different languages, these groups are often defined not only by field, but also by grammatical criteria.

The first of such typological studies is P. Oswald's "Frz. „campagne" und seine Nachbarwörter im Vergleich mit dem Deutschen, Englischen, Italienische und Spanischen. Ein Beitrag zur Wortfeldtheorie" (A typology of the French word 'campagne' and its cognates in German, English, Italian and Spanish. Additions to the theory of the semantic field of words) [Oswald 1970]. As the title of the book states, the author's contribution to the theory is that the meanings of words are not strictly separated, but intersect; their intersection is a concept that unites these lexicons into a semantic field (in this case, it corresponds to the meaning of the word). The author came to this conclusion on the basis of an analysis of the translation alternatives of the French word *campagne* in German, English, Italian and Spanish. The results of the comparison show that the similar semantic fields of French and Italian are close to each other. In Oswald's work, synchronicity The approach is used in conjunction with the diachronic approach.

Gunter Karcher's monograph on the study of the semantic field of "reservoirs and watercourses" in German and English was carried out on the basis of a combination of field and component approaches of synchronous contrastive analysis [Karcher 1979]. The paradigm of the semantic field of each language is determined with the help of explanatory, ideographic and synonymous dictionaries and is corrected on the basis of the elimination of dialect words, personal names and terms, complex, borrowed words. Analysis of the dictionary definitions of the words that make up the semantic field of each language allows us to identify 19 semantic components (noems), which constitute the meanings of the lexical units under study. The results are presented in the form of matrix tables and grid diagrams. These diagrams, in the author's opinion, illustrate the structure of semantic fields and the differences in the classification of linguistic reality in German and English. Unfortunately, grid diagrams are rarely commented on in the book.

In recent years, the concept of "language field" has been introduced for contrastive studies. It is the result of the overlapping of similarly named fields in two languages and is

defined as a semantic field located in a certain order between a group of units of two languages to express a universal concept [Semenova 1989: 37-38].

Like semantic sign theory, semantic field theory has its strengths and weaknesses. Some of the problems that make analysis difficult in this theory are:

1. The semantic field does not have clear boundaries. A single procedure has not been created that would allow for a precise definition of the word paradigm belonging to a particular semantic field.
2. The semantic field does not fully cover the entire linguistic reality. There are no lexicons in different languages that would be suitable for expressing conceptual units in its structures.
3. The meanings of lexical units in the semantic field are not strictly separated, but intersect in a certain part. In this case, cases of complete synonymy are very rare. The method of component analysis allows for a detailed analysis of the semantic structure of semantic fields, but does not solve all problems.

In contrastive grammatical studies, the theory of the functional-semantic field plays an important role [Bondarko 1983]. Its content plan is formed by semantic categories such as aspectuality, temporality, syllogism, and others. The main semantic categories are universal, and they analyze the means of expression in the languages they study, which can belong to the grammatical, lexical, or prosodic levels. In the structure of the functional-semantic field, central components (regular and systematic means of expressing this semantic category of the language, in most cases morphological means) and peripheral components (lexico-grammatical, lexical, and syntactic means) are distinguished.

Central and peripheral components can also be distinguished in the hierarchy of semantic signs that make up the meaning of a lexical unit. Then, alternative lexicons are considered to be units in the hierarchy of signs that make up the meaning of lexical units, the central components of which are the same, but which may have some differences [Sternemann 1983: 47]. It is very difficult to speak about the alternativeness of semantic fields in general. They usually cover a large range of means of expressing their meaning, so it is unlikely that their structure and content will completely coincide in different languages. It is possible to assume that the two languages have a complete system of kinship terms or color-expressive systems, but the probability that the structure and content of

two lexical-semantic fields in different languages completely coincide is very small.

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