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## ON SOME ISSUES OF SYNONYMY

*The paper touches upon the notion of synonymy in English. Special attention is paid to the role of context in classification of synonymous words. The study is mainly based on the differences of semantic and syntactic character to show how a particular context requires the usage of a corresponding word.*

**Key words:** *synonym, absolute and partial synonymy, similarity of meaning, semantic component, word usage, semantic nuances*

Synonymy is one of the most controversial issues of modern linguistics. Technically, it occurs when two or more linguistic forms are used to substitute one another in the speech or text but as a result the conveyed meaning doesn't change. Practically, synonymous words convey the same meaning if taken separately but they can not be substituted in any context. Accordingly, the meanings of synonymous words can be *the same* or *almost the same*. That is why it is accepted to qualify synonyms as *similar*, but *not identical* words.

In this paper we study different approaches and classifications of synonyms as well as how synonymous words can substitute one another in the context.

While searching for an alternative word one must be sure that the synonym chosen is accurate and precise and meets the requirements of the literary and correct speech. The approaches to synonyms in linguistics mainly vary according to their application in context.

J. Lyons suggests three approaches to synonymy. The words and expressions listed as synonymous in dictionaries he calls *near-synonyms* and qualifies them as more or less similar but not identical in meaning. One should not confuse them with *partial* and *absolute* synonyms. The scholar introduces the notion of absolute synonymy as extremely rare and even hardly existing in language as absolute synonyms are synonymous in all contexts without any exception. What fails to satisfy this condition he calls a partial synonym /Lyons, 1995: 60-61/. This kind of approach to synonymy allows us to have a separate list of synonymous words, use them in different contexts to test their interchangeability before calling them absolute or partial.

As a result J.Lyons distinguishes between two kinds of synonyms and calls them **complete** and **absolute** synonyms: "Lexemes can be said to be *completely synonymous* in a certain range of contexts only if they have the same descriptive, expressive and social meaning in the range of contexts in questions. They may be described as *absolutely synonymous* if they have the same distribution and are

completely synonymous in all their meanings and in all their contexts of occurrence” /Lyons, 1981: 148/.

W.Quine introduces two kinds of synonyms - *complete* and *partial*. Complete synonyms are regarded as words having identical meaning components. In more specific terms words are complete synonyms if they share all ingredients with one another. This kind of synonymy does not exist simply because it is impossible to define, and the meanings of words in monolingual or multilingual settings are constantly changing. Therefore, words may share most of the constituents with one another but not all. As for partial synonymy, it is when words share most of the necessary components /Quine, 1951/.

For example, the words *finish* and *terminate* may share most of the characteristics but they are still different in some respects. The word *finish* suggests the final stage of doing something, whereas *terminate* suggests reaching a limit.

F.Palmer suggests a test for synonymy by substituting one word for another. Absolute synonyms are mutually interchangeable in *all* contexts that is why they are very rare in language /Palmer, 1983: 69-72/.

In fact, it is very often said that there do not exist **absolute** or **true synonyms** for any word, that is, a form that is identical in every aspect of meaning so that the two can be applied interchangeably. G.N. Leech and J. Lyons argue this point of view and define **scientific terms** as the only true synonyms which can act in very special contexts. “As it turns out, these so-called true synonyms are frequently technical terms and almost always concrete words coming from linguistically disparate sources” /Leech, 1983/. But what happens when we have two absolute synonyms is that speakers in general tend to use one of the two synonymous words and agree that the chosen word should be always used to refer to the concept they are describing /Lyons, 1977: 98-101/.

So, it can be said that absolute synonymy occurs where all contextual relations between the two terms and all their meanings are identical, that is, roughly speaking, in all linguistic contexts, the two terms are interchangeable without any difference in meaning. It is more difficult to show that two words are in fact absolute synonyms. This view of synonymy is restrictive.

When dealing with synonymous words we must look at the different componential features of the meanings of these synonyms and select only those meanings which compete in the same semantic fields. In modern linguistics it is considered two dimensions along which words can vary - *semantic* and *stylistic* or *denotative* and *connotative*. If two words differ semantically their substitution in a sentence or discourse will not necessarily preserve truth conditions as the denotations are not identical. If two words differ in stylistic features substitution preserves truth conditions but the connotation which is stylistic is changed.

While studying synonyms H.Muffin suggests three characteristics of words that almost never coincide - *denotation*, *connotation* and *range of applicability*. The rare cases they coincide can be called true synonyms /Mifflin, 2004: 12/.

D.A. Cruse defines synonyms as such words that may be substituted wholly or almost wholly in the same terms. Usually they are distinguished from one another by an added implication or connotation or they may differ in their idiomatic use or application. So synonyms are those words that may replace each other in various contextual circumstances. A basic distinction can be drawn between denotative and connotative meanings that is between communicative experience and semantic effects. It is very important to note that synonyms are usually different in their semantic effects /Cruse, 1986: 292/. For example, *cell phone* and *mobile phone*. These meet the criteria for true synonymy as they have precisely the same denotations, connotations and range of applicability and are used in identical contexts.

We think that synonymous terms are those having nearly identical denotations. We very often have a choice from among a set of words of the same denotation such as *shore*, *coast*, *bank*. The reason for choosing one of these words over another is frequently more stylistic than semantic. One may prefer a simpler or a more complex word or may prefer a more or a less formal term. However, the fact that these words share a denotation makes them synonymous and substitutable for words one has in mind so that one can be more precise and avoid repetition. English is rich in such words.

F.Palmer differentiates between synonyms in five ways:

- Some synonyms belong to different dialects of the language. For instance, the word *fall* is used in the United States and *autumn* is used in Britain.
- Some synonyms are used in different styles according to the degree of formality as colloquial, formal - *gentleman* (formal), *man*, *chap* (informal).
- Some words differ only in their emotive or evaluative values but their cognitive meaning is the same - *hide*, *conceal*.
- Some words are subject to collocational restraints as they occur only with specific words - *rancid* occurs with *butter*, *addled* with *eggs*.
- The meanings of some words overlap - *mature*, *adult*, *ripe* /Palmer, 1981: 89/.

If we examine words according to these ways we will have a larger set of synonyms.

Theoretically, one of the most well-known classification systems for synonyms was established by V.Vinogradov where he distinguishes three types of synonyms:

1. *Ideographic* which are words conveying the same concept but different in the shades of meaning.
2. *Stylistic* which are words different in stylistic characteristics.
3. *Absolute* are called those synonyms which once coincide in all their shades of meaning and in all their stylistic characteristics /Vinogradov, 2003/.

In order to consider two words synonymous they have to be identical and share all essential components and capable of being used to substitute one another in all contexts without any noticeable difference in their meanings. This kind of synonymy does not exist. As was mentioned above, synonyms are words having

similar meaning. Similarly two phrases or sentences are synonymous when they mean the same. The usual criterion is that meaning is preserved when they are substituted one for the other.

Speaking of synonyms, D. A. Cruse suggests to pay attention to the use of “irrelevant senses” of a word form /Cruse, 1986: 270/. This means that substituted words should be synonyms that is they should be “equal”. For example: He had more responsibility in his *old* job. / He had more responsibility in his *former* job. Here *old* and *former* aren’t synonyms though they both “have something common with the *past*”.

Synonymy can only hold between words belonging to the same part of speech. It is defined as two words from the same word class referring to one concept or object. This is the classical form of synonymy. For example: “movie and film” (noun), “buy and purchase” (verb), “pretty and attractive” (adj.), “quickly and speedily” (adv.), “on and upon” (prep.) etc.

The process of using synonyms will never be perfect because many words in English are used in many different ways as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, etc. Also many words have many different meanings in various contexts. The replacement words are often inappropriate and make no sense in the context of the sentence. In order for true synonymy to exist, the two words must be identical in meaning when they are transposed into the same sentence. However, this is often not possible because of the dual meanings that some words possess.

As we see, nearly all scholars consider synonymy with special reference to the notion of context in terms of exact replacement and interchangeability. That is, words can be described as synonymous if they replace each other in some or all contexts. Moreover, equivalence may be regarded as an appropriate criterion as every linguistic unit has a characteristic distribution. If two or more units occur in the same range of contexts they have the same distribution.

When we use language for the purpose of communication, we choose the most suitable word to convey thoughts in the way the listener will better understand us. The use of synonyms as well as any linguistic choice in some sense depends on who are our listeners and what is needed to communicate more effectively. So it is important to note: firstly, by synonymy here it is meant not merely the sameness of reference or denotation but sameness of sense. Secondly, it is assumed that a synonym is an equivalent of other word. Lastly, here it is spoken of synonymy as a relation between substitutable words in sentences. This approach can be summed up as follows: it is possible to obtain any synonymous sentence by a number of synonym-for-synonym replacements among the parts.

Thus, we come to the conclusion that synonyms are treated as words sharing several characteristics with one another. In all the abovementioned approaches to synonymy the role of context is crucial. All scholars suggest testing the synonyms in context for qualifying them as absolute or partial (complete).

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**Ն. ՄԱՆՈՒԿՅԱՆ, Հ. ՆԻԿՈԳՈՍՅԱՆ – Հոմանիշ հասկացության որոշ հարցերի շուրջ.** – Հոդվածը նվիրված է «հոմանիշ» հասկացության ուսումնասիրությանը, հոմանիշների տեսակներին և դասակարգումներին անգլերենում: Առանձնակի ուշադրության են արժանանում համատեքստում համապատասխան բառային լուծումները՝ իմաստային և շարահյուսական ներդաշնակությունն ապահովելու համար:

**Բանալի բառեր.** հոմանիշ, բացարձակ և մասնակի հոմանիշներ, իմաստային հարաբերություններ, իմաստային բաղադրիչ, իմաստային նրբերանգներ

**Н. МАНУКЯН, Р. НИКОГОСЯН – О некоторых подходах к проблеме синонимии.** – В статье рассматриваются различные подходы к синонимии в английском языке. Приводятся классификации синонимов, особое внимание обращается на роль контекста в определении синонимов.

**Ключевые слова:** синоним, абсолютные и частичные синонимы, смысловые отношения, семантический компонент, словоупотребление