

SOME THEORETICAL PROBLEMS IN THE DESCRIPTION OF RUSSIAN SEMANTICS

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ABSTRACT: The article is devoted to the study of a few theoretical problems in russian semantics. After reminding shortly of the origin and etymology of the concept of “semantics”, we tried to sort out its linguistic definition with a historical overview. Since our paper deals with russian linguistics, we have decided to quote a few Russian scholars with rich investigations in that field such as I.A. Sternin Z.G. Popova, Y.D. Apresyan, R.S. Ginzurg, V.G. Gak, E.V. Kuznetsova etc. The issues posed by the study of russian linguistics is still up to date. Problems such as the evolution of semantics in the 20th century, the scale of semantic derivations or the problem of semantic calques among other have been raised and discussed widely.

Keywords: *semantics, russian language, semantic problems, linguists, scientists, meaning of words, origin.*

INTRODUCTION

Semantics is a section of linguistics that studies the meaning of language units. Semantic analysis is used as a study tool. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, semantics was often called semasiology (from the Greek *sēmaino* — I indicate, I mean). Scientists who study semantics are still called

semasiologists (although this term is competed with by others). Also, “semantics” can denote the range of meanings of a certain class of linguistic units (“semantics of verbs of motion”).

In the studies of the Voronezh theoretical-linguistic school in Russia (Popova, Sternin 2009, Sternin 2003), the largest constituents of the sememe are distinguished, the mega components. The first of them represents the lexical meaning of the word and the second, the structural-linguistic meaning. Russian semantics poses a wide range of issues that are still being discussed among linguists and semasiologists. It seems to us important to mention that the evolution of russian semantics is related to the problem of the origin of words’ meaning, an important point to be developed. In addition, the scale of semantic derivations and the problem of semantic calques are analyzed along with the question of word formation (which is the last discussion point).

This article states clearly the theoretical problems of semantics as an important branch of Russian linguistics. Moreover, it contributes to finding solutions to semantic nuances that are often confused, for example, the lexical meaning and the structural meaning of Russian lexemes. After reading this article, the reader can easily trace the definition of Russian semantics, its historical development, the issues concerning the origin of word meanings, the evolution of semantics in the 20th century, the scale of semantic derivation the problem of semantic calques. In the last part (conclusion), we proposed solutions to tackle the described issues.

Using the analytical and descriptive method, (which consists of describing linguistic facts using a synchronic aspect) we are going to expose respectively the issue of the origin of words’ meanings and the evolution of semantics in the 20th century after which we’ll carry on with the Scale of semantic derivations and the problem of semantic calques.

1. The problems of the origin of words’ meanings

The discussion points turn around the problem of the origin of words’ meaning, the evolution of semantics in the 20th century, the question of the etymological meaning

of a word, the scale of semantic derivations, the problem of semantic calques and the problem of word formation.

The concept of the meaning of a word as a structure of components is an achievement of semiotic semasiology, which, became widespread in semantic research in the 60s and 70s of the last century thanks to the discovery of component analysis (Yu.D. Apresyan, R.S. Ginzburg, V.G. Gak, E.V. Kuznetsova, A.M. Kuznetsov, L.M. Vasilev, O.N. Seliverstova, M.V. Nikitin and many others). The separate meaning of a word is called a sememe. The material side of any word is called a lexeme (Kopylenko, Popova). Beyond the necessity of defining the above concepts, a historical survey is still necessary to surround the origin of words' meaning and to pose the semantic issues in general.

1.1. Historical issues

Semantic problems were posed and discussed by philosophical thoughts already in ancient times. Such are the disputes about the origin of the meanings of words and their relations to being and thinking, conducted by analogists and anomalists in antiquity and nominalists, realists, conceptualists in the Middle Age. Let us take as an example the doctrine of suppositions, which is, about changes in the meaning of a word depending on the context and the specific situation, developed by medieval scholasticism. For example, the problems of the adequacy of linguistic expressions to thinking and the origin of contradictions between them and the problems of the development of thinking and language that is put forward by the philosophy of the 17th-18th centuries. But all these problems were discussed outside the development of linguistic disciplines properly speaking; for example, grammar. The study of historical issues helps understand modern issues.

1.2. Modern issues

In the linguistic plan, and until the beginning of the XIX century, only one discipline - etymology - touches upon the problems of semantics, since, explaining the formation of some words from others, it is forced to both register and explain changes in the meanings of words. Only in the second half of the XIX century, in connection with the growing interest not only in the sound but also in the

"psychological" side of language. The question of the need to single out semantics as a study of changes in meaning arose; initially only of words (the term "semantics" itself was introduced by the French linguist M. Breal). One of the applied problems in the study of the semantics of language arose with the need for an adequate search for information on the internet at the user's request. The theory of semantic analysis is aimed at solving problems related to the ability to understand the meaning of a phrase and issue a request to a search engine in the required form.

2. The evolution of semantics in the 20th century

The development of semantics in the late XIX - early XX centuries was carried out almost exclusively by representatives of various psychological trends in linguistics. The latter tried to find in the patterns of "mental processes" occurring in the individual consciousness the basis for the patterns of semantic changes (detailed constructions by Wundt, Rozwadowski, Martinak, Jaberg, etc.). In the 1910-1920s, semantics attracted much more attention. At the Russian linguistics school of the 20th century, the research in semantics were carried out by famous linguists/scientists such as I.A. Sternin, Z.D. Popova, Y.D. Apresyan, E.V. Kuznetsova, Sherba, Vinogradov, Kutozov, Kuzmenko among others. The semantics studies by the latter will be analyzed but before that, we find it necessary to highlight the definition of a word by linguists of the XIX - XX centuries.

2.1. The definition of a word itself

Linguists of the XIX - early XX centuries hardly touched upon the question of defining the meaning of a word itself, leaving the solution of this question to philosophers and psychologists. They are satisfied with the fact of identifying the meaning of a word either with the object it names, or with the reproduction of this object in the consciousness of the speaker - with an idea; the latter definition of the meaning of a word was especially widespread, repeated at that time both in popular introductions to linguistics and in special works on semantics (Erdmann, Nürop). Only one side of the meaning of a word is subject to more detailed discussion in linguistics of the XIX - early XX centuries. This is the so-called etymological

meaning, that is, the meaning revealed in a word by its etymological analysis, establishing its connection with other words of the same or similar languages.

The key studies that support our statements are found in the scientific research led by scholars mostly Russian such as Sternin I.A. Z.D. Popova, L. Sherba or V. Vinogradov. They have consequently tried to explore semantic changes and define the relationship between language, culture and society.

2.2. The studies of Scherba, Vinogradov, Kutuzov and Kuzmenko

Russian semantics from the 20th century are led by a wide range of scholars among which Iossef Abramovitch Sternin, Z.D. Popova, Kuznetsov (Voronezh theoretical and practical linguistic school in Russia). Furthermore, the studies led by L.Scherba, V.Vinogradov in the middle of the 20th century are capital.

Scherba and Vinogradov analyzed the theory of russian lexicography and the development of an entire semantic conception for Russian language. They investigated more in depth the relationship between lexicography and linguistic theory and the systematic organization of vocabulary. As for Kutuzov, Kuzmenko and Fomin, they focused on how the meaning of a word evolves over time, particularly in relation to historical periods like pre-Soviet and Soviet times. In addition, research on the semantic changes of specific words, such as “дом” {dom} i.e. “home” or “house” and “пенсионер” {pensionier} i.e. ”pensioner”, have shed light on how cultural and social factors influence language.

2.3. The study of the etymological meaning of a word

The problem of the relationship of this etymological meaning or, more briefly, etymon to the entire content of the word is discussed among linguistics of the XIX century, beginning with W. Humboldt. Humboldt's definition of this relationship as an internal form of a word expressing a view of an object given in the corresponding language was interpreted by psychologists as an expression in the language of a figurative representation of an object (Steinthal) or a dominant feature of a representation (Wundt), and by their opponents - as a structure of its form unrelated to the content of the word - (Marty).

The study of Russian semantic problems is at the center of modern Russian linguistics because it's still being investigated by Russian linguists and semasiologists. In our point of view, these semantic issues are reflected not only in the study of the meaning of Russian words but also in the essence of Russian language, its functioning, history and historical development.

3. The Scale of semantic derivations

Semantic derivations deal with the process of a new meaning formation inside the semantic structure of a word.

In Russian language, semantic derivations refer to the creation of new words with related meanings from existing words, focusing on how meanings evolve and change within a word's semantic structure. This process can be diachronic (over time) or synchronic (within a specific time period).

The semantic structure of a word in Russian is variable depending on the suffixes or prefixes of the word. However, the prefix plays a more relevant role and shows best the practical relevance of semantic derivation of Russian words. The best example to support this assertion is the so-called "глагольные движения" {glagolnie divizheniya}, the verbs of movement. Let's take the Russian verb of movement "идти", {idti} which means to "go". If the prefix "перей" {perey} is added to the verb {idti}, it becomes "перейти" which means to cross, "перейти через дорогу" i.e. "to cross the road". But if we add the prefix "обой" {obay} to the verb {idti}, it gives "обойти" {obayti} which means to go round a circle. If we carry on adding other suffixes it gives many other different meanings.

Semantic derivations over distance are referred to as the magnitude of the discrepancy. So, the scale of semantic derivations refers to the magnitude of the discrepancy, semantic derivation over distance, its evolution as a result of reconstruction and its patterns in lexicology.

3.1. The magnitude of the discrepancy

The question of the "scale" of semantic derivations under consideration, i.e. the magnitude of the discrepancy between the meanings, is very important. The fact is

that between two members of the semantic derivation relationship there can be different semantic distances. The optimal (for our purposes) distance seems to be approximately the one that separates the meanings of one word in traditional explanatory (or bilingual) dictionaries - which roughly corresponds to the Kurilovich criterion (different meanings are those that have different synonymous one-word expressions). That is, we have in mind the framework of the "usual" relations of polysemy; they are opposed, on the one hand, to homonymy, and on the other hand, to "sub-meanings" (i.e. variants within the enumerated meanings).

3.2 . Semantic derivations over distance

Semantic derivation of a greater distance is what etymology and reconstruction in general operate with: cf. the famous example of Benveniste's semantic reconstruction for the French. The verb "voler", which has the meanings 'to fly' and 'to steal', which are homonyms in modern language, but their unity can be restored in the use of the type "le faucon vole la perdrix" 'the falcon pursues and catches the partridge in flight', literally 'the falcon flies the partridge' [Benveniste 1974: 333]. On the contrary, there is a smaller distance between meanings that differ in the set or status of actants: The hussar jingled his spurs and the spurs jingled. The skirt sweeps along the pavement, the knife cuts well (derivation of this scale is studied, in particular, in the works of E.V. Paducheva, R.I. Rozina and G.I. Kustova within the framework of the lexicographer system). Of course, both of these boundaries are largely arbitrary, but one way or another we can say that semantic derivations of the 'medium' distance are included in the catalogue.

3.3. The evolution of semantic derivations

The following circumstances prevent the inclusion of semantic derivations of large and small distances in the consideration: semantic derivations of large distances are predominantly the result of reconstruction, i.e. they contain an element of hypotheticality; at the first stage, it makes sense not to include such semantic derivations in the consideration, so as not to mix information of varying degrees of accuracy. As for, on the contrary, small distances, this is material for solving another problem (for example, the problem of creating a kind of generative model for

polysemy, solved in the lexicographic system, see [Kustova, Paducheva 1994] and others).

3.4. Semantic derivations in lexicology

The difference in the formulation of the problem consists, first of all, in the fact that in lexicography, the patterns of semantic derivation within certain classes of words are studied, and in our catalogue individual changes in meanings. In our system, the pattern is sought not inductively (by identifying the semantic mechanism of derivation), but, so to speak, empirically - it follows from the very fact of the repeatability of a given semantic transition, its independent reproduction in different languages in different eras. It is also important to emphasize that the object of cataloguing is changes in meanings, not semantic components or semantic features. Therefore, "typical" semantic derivations - for example, the difference between the process and stative meaning of such verbs as think, speak, depict, 'obrazovatel' (i.e. categorical, typical shifts that repeat within classes of words), as well as metonymies such as "container - its contents" are not included in the catalog. This is a different task (and in particular, interlingual identification is of no special interest here). Thus, we are talking only about changes in individual meanings of words - but only those that are repeatedly reproduced, which proves the non-random nature of these changes.

4. The problem of semantic calques

The last statement requires one very important caveat. The fact is that the reproduction of a certain semantic derivation by different languages may be due not to parallel (independent) semantic development, but to the borrowing of this derivative meaning - i.e. the result of semantic calques. At the same time, establishing the fact of calques is a completely separate procedure, requiring the use of other (historical-philological) methods of analysis, which is beyond the scope of our task. (We find brilliant examples of such work, for example, in the studies of V.V. Vinogradov on the "history of words".) Only cases of "suspicious" similarity can be identified by purely linguistic methods. Cf., for example, the similar internal form of

the word with the meaning of "train" in German, Polish and Czech, which suggests calques.

5. The problem of word formation

We distinguish the word formation of spoken Russian and the formation of Russian colloquial words

5.1 The word formation in spoken Russian

The word formation level of the spoken language is quite vividly represented. Among the speech colloquial neologisms one can single out the standard formations created by the usual methods of derivation in accordance with the word formation types of the language. Among the usual methods of word formation in Russian colloquial speech, the mainstream is the affixal method, and its most productive variety is called suffixing. In colloquial speech, nouns are most often formed with the help of suffixes. The results of the analysis showed that the most productive suffixes with the meaning of the person are: -чик/-щик, -чиц(а)/-щиц(а), -ник/-ниц(а), -ун, -тель, which serve for naming a person by an action characteristic of him, for example, О, это лучший игральныйщик в «Что? Где? Когда?»; сколько можно сидеть за компьютером, виртуальныйщик! А, это наша претендовщица на должность главного бухгалтера?!; Тот же мне думатель нашёлся; Опоздунов будем наказывать; Я сегодня три часа с егэшниками занималась. For naming objects, suffixes -тель, -ник, -лк are frequently used, for example, разрезатель (about a knife); охлаждаватель (an air conditioner); протыкалка (about a punch), мазилка / замазывалка (about correcting fluid); стиралка (about a washing machine or an eraser); держалка (about the handle of a pan); поливалка (about a watering pot).

5.2 The formation of Russian colloquial words

The formation of colloquial words using diminutive suffixes -ишк, -оньк, -еньк, -очк, -ушк, -чик, etc., the so-called diminutives, is worth noting. For example, домишко, вкусняшка, денежка, пуговичка, книжечка, остановочка, супчик, печенюшка, творожок, ясенюк, ладненько, юбочка, etc. These suffixes are very typical of the Russian spoken language, which, as a rule, is more emotional and

expressive than written. On this subject, E.A. Stolyarova notes: ‘It is in the sphere of colloquial speech that we are not stingy in emotions and express (sometimes even unconsciously) our attitude to what we are talking about... Largely, the use of diminutives is individually determined by personal speech habits and tastes of the speakers, but their very presence is an integral feature of colloquial speech. It is the colloquial speech where the diminutives are created, mainly used and give it a bright color, expressing various feelings and moods of the speakers’ (Shatalova, 2009). In addition, the formation of verbal nouns with colloquial coloration with the help of the suffix -ниј(е) is typical, for example, доставание денег, нехождение на занятия, разгребание бумаг, etc.

6. The complexity of Russian semantics

Comparing to French or English, Russian semantics is fundamentally different and more complex than that of other languages like English or French. Russian semantics seems more complex because it is far richer comparing to French or English. The reasons are simple and understandable.

The first reason is a lexicological reason. If we take the lexicological contents for example of the lexeme “linguistics”, we find three ways to name lexicology in Russian language. In other words, the Russian word linguistics, “языкознание” {yazikoznanie}, has two synonyms in Russian language: “языковедение” {yazikovedenie} and “лингвистика” {lingvistika}. These are the three Russian ways to say linguistics whereas in French and English there is one one word to name linguistics i.e. respectively “linguistique” in French and “linguistics” in English.

The second reason is grammatical. The complexity of Russian grammar is tempered by the flexibility of its sentence building. Russian sentences are built in a very flexible way. If in most European languages sentences are classically composed of a subject plus a verb plus an object for example in English and French, the subject comes first, then the verb and finally the object. If the order is not followed either in English or in French, then the sentence makes no sense at all. In Russian grammar it is totally different. The Russian sentence building is very flexible. It is composed of the same sentence patterns i.e. a subject plus a verb plus an object but the order is not

important. The subject can come first then the verb, then the object. If the verb comes first then the subject then the object it does not matter at all. The sentence remains grammatically correct and understandable. Example: “Я иду домой” {Ya idu damoy}, (Я is the subject, иду the verb, домой the object): I go home. It is fine to say “иду я домой” {idu ya damoy} or “домой я иду” {damoy ya idu}. All the three sentences have the same meaning and are grammatically correct. We can find hundreds of examples like this.

Another reason is that a lot of Russian words have a polysemic character. They are semantically richer comparing to French or English. The Russian verb “идти” i.e. to go can be used in at least thirty different contexts. In other words “идти” has more than thirty meanings when analyzing and comparing its French equivalent the French verb “aller”, we did not find more than eight and ten contexts maximum. In English the lexeme “to go” is not that rich semantically speaking. As the result, we can affirm that the semantics of Russian language is proven to be rich but complex at the same time comparing to English and French.

Conclusion

To sum up, we can stress out that semantics is the science of the meaning of a word. Russian language is an extremely dynamic and modern language. Therefore, the problem of the evolution of russian semantics and the evolution of russian language itself as a whole poses the problem of its preservation, originality and distinctiveness in a global world mostly led by more popular languages such as English or French.

Russian scientists and semasiologists have conducted a wide range of studies in the field of semantics. One of the main problems in describing Russian semantics is the complex formation process of Russian words, unlike words in English or French. Another problem is that many words in Russian are overused and have a polysemantic sense, which makes Russian one of the richest languages semantically speaking. The most efficient way to tackle the above issues could be first to facilitate the process of optimizing and teaching Russian semantics. Second, to detach semantics and make it a separate branch in Russian linguistics.

Russian semantics is influenced by the combination of the above described perspectives. Russian language is primarily influenced by a combination of factors, including the ancient Old Church Slavonic language inspired by the ancient Greek language, the Cyrillic. Nowadays Russian semantics is mostly influenced by western European linguistic and cultural nuances that shape the use of Russian language within Russian society.

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