

CONTEXTUAL EQUIVALENTS OF SYNONYMS

В современной дискурсивной и когнитивной лингвистике представляется актуальным исследование семантических групп слов, в частности, синонимов и их стилистических эквивалентов. Статья посвящена разным аспектам синонимов и их контекстуальных эквивалентов, даны их стилистические характеристики. Показано, что эвфемизмы, гипонимы, гиперонимы и перифраз – играют важную роль при замене слов в определенном тексте. Примеры, выбранные из разных художественных текстов, иллюстрируют контекстуальные особенности рассматриваемых лексических и стилистических единиц.

Synonyms as words or phrases meaning exactly or nearly the same as another word or phrase in the same language, which can sometimes easily substitute one another in a given context, is believed to belong to the same part of speech. But through methods of stylistic analysis, observation, and description we came to a conclusion that euphemisms, hyponyms and periphrasis may also serve as contextual equivalents of synonyms.

The facts of a language cannot be comprehended, analyzed, generalized, and even simply arranged in some elementary sequence, without observation. This technique is repetitive actions, “operations” of our consciousness, aimed at recognizing the repetitive elements of the language, their signs, and their differences. Repetition is one of the characteristic features in a text by means of which the most important aspect in the writing process, a writer’s ability to select words, is revealed. In terms of stylistic analysis of the vocabulary of literary works, we take no interest in the origin of the word, but the coloring in the meaning. In analyzing their style a careful attention should be paid to words which are used with special colorings and meanings. Through stylistic analysis the basic element of which is a text, we can come across different kinds of phrases that make the context meaningful. For example, W. S. Maugham used the following words as synonyms of the word “to be embarrassed” in his novel “Theatre”: *To redden, to flush, to blush scarlet, to go scarlet, to make smb. ashamed, to grow red, to feel shy, to be red:*

1) *“Have you ever taken an actress out to supper before?” He blushed scarlet* [10, p. 88].

2) *She gave him a searching look. “Have you pawned it?” He reddened again* [10, p. 89].

3) *The author flushed. Julia looked at him with veneration. He felt shy and happy and proud* [10, p. 200].

These examples prove the author’s attitude towards his own language, his ability of pragmatic use of its rich vocabulary. The more people know the lexical-semantic system of a language, its synonyms the better they can characterize the objects and events in detail.

There are different words and combinations used to express the same event, idea, even the same thing. Choosing the appropriate word or phrase is a cultural issue. Euphemisms are highly contextual means from this point. The use of euphemisms reduces the ill effects of the words to some extent. Since euphemisms are used in order to soften the meaning of a word they are usually employed when speaking about sensitive topics. Only the most common areas such as relations, food, body parts, death and disease are chosen because of their high frequency of occurrence in an everyday discourse. For example, instead of using *to die* we can say *to pass away*, *to join the majority*, *to go to a better place*, *to kick the bucket*.

According to R. Keyes “Euphemism is a form of a synonym. They have far heavier freight to carry. It is a consideration of the ways euphemisms enter our conversations and how they reflect their time and place. Euphemizing most often results from an excess of politeness and prudery, but it can also demonstrate creativity and high good humour” [1, p. 8]. There is a tendency to maintain courtesy and social tact in interpersonal communication. In order to keep harmony in a conversation we try to avoid an argument that our speech can cause.

“How is Helen Burns?”

“Very poorly,” was the answer.

“Is it her Mr. Bates has been to see?”

“Yes.”

“And what does he say about her?”

“He says she’ll not be here long.”

This phrase, uttered in my hearing yesterday, would have only conveyed the notion that she was about to be removed to Northumberland, to her own home; I should not have suspected that it meant she was dying; but I knew instantly now; it opened clear on my comprehension that Helen Burns was numbering her last days in the world, and that she was going to be taken to the region of spirits, if such region there were [6, p. 47].

In this part, taken from “Jane Eyre”, a little girl called Helen Burns is ill and it is doubtless that she is going to die. The writer creatively depicts the scene by using euphemistic phrases which make it vivid in a reader’s mind.

Linfoot-Ham adds that “in order for communication to progress smoothly and without conflict, accommodations are continually, and often subconsciously, made” [2, p. 228]. They are rooted so deeply in our language that we use them without knowing it. Euphemisms are not considered to be stable items in a language because they are created almost daily. Some of them get into the centre of vocabulary and maintain their euphemistic status, but the others enter only the periphery and later on they disappear from our word stock. *Sleep with* or *pass away* are examples of those euphemisms which have been in the vocabulary for hundreds of years and they are still in use. Even some of them were intended to be primarily euphemisms, but in the course of time they became a part of everyday vocabulary and lost their euphemistic value.

... The porter went into the door, followed by the gray-haired woman, then came hurrying back [9, p. 92].

... *When he came back there was an elderly woman wearing glasses with him. Her hair was loose and half-falling and she wore a nurse's dress* [9, p. 92].

Mr. Reed had been dead nine years: it was in this chamber he breathed his last [6, p. 7].

B. Warren made a model which is based on the idea that “novel contextual meanings”, i.e. new meanings for words in a particular context, are constantly created in a language. This creation is rule-governed and the acceptability of new meanings depends on, for example, the strength of ties between the novel term and its referent, whether the novel term is considered to be of lasting value, i.e. the referent has no other name, or if the novel term is a “desirable alternative” [3, p. 130]. This is the situation that results in the creation of euphemistic terms. B. Warren gives four devices for euphemism formation the fourth of which is called “Semantic innovation”. In this case, a “novel sense for some established word or word combination is created” [Ibid, p. 133].

How sad to be lying now on a sick bed, and to be in danger of dying! This world is pleasant – it would be dreary to be called from it, and to have to go who knows where? [6, p. 47].

Another contextual equivalent of synonyms is hyponym that makes the speech attractive and colorful. From pragmatic point, hyponyms serve as a fundamental mean of systematic organization of lexicology: synonymous and antonymous relations between the words and thematic groups of words are somehow realized with the help of hyponyms. For example, hyperonym of *feeling* may include in itself the words *love, friendship, respect*, synonyms *sympathy, affection*, antonyms *love – hate*. The feeling *sadness* is the indicator of *sorrow, melancholy, grief, mournfulness*, etc. These hyponyms may be related to synonyms only in the context.

Sadness – the feeling of being sad or unhappy;

Sorrow – a feeling of great sadness;

Melancholy – sadness that lasts for a long period of time, often without any obvious reason

Grief – very great sadness, especially at the death of someone;

Mournfulness – very sad [7].

If a man feels the emotion of *grief*, he feels the emotion of *sorrow* and *sadness at the same time*. Although these words differ from the words of hyperonym-hyponym relations in the example given below, it is clear that they have played a special role in the formation of the text.

... *She had baths built in the courtyard in the shade of the chestnut tree, one for the **women** and another for the **men**, and in the rear a large **stable**, a **fenced-in chicken yard**, a **shed** for the milk **cows**, and an **aviary open** to the four windows so that wondering **birds** could roast there at their pleasure* [9, p. 60].

In this example, the author could skillfully use different groups of words: *women, men* (people); *fenced-in chicken yard, stable, shed, aviary* (a special place); *chicken, cows, birds* (animals). If the words in brackets were used, the part of the text would seem monotonous.

The red-room was spare chamber, very seldom slept in... A bed supported on massive pillars of mahogany, hung with curtains of deep red damask, ...the two large windows, with their blinds always drawn down, ...the carpet was red; to table at the foot of the bed was covered with crimson cloth; the walls were a soft fawn colour, with a flush of pink in it; the wardrobe, the toilet-table, the chairs were of darkly polished mahogany. Out of this surrounding shades rose high, and glared white, the piled-up mattresses and pillows of the bed... Scarcely less prominent was an ample, cushioned easy-chair near the head of the bed, also white, with a footstool before it; and looking, as I thought, like a pale throne.

This room was chill, because it seldom had a fire; it was silent, because remote from the nursery and kitchens; solemn, because it was known to be so seldom entered. The housemaid alone came here on Saturdays, to wipe from the mirrors and the furniture a week's quiet dust: and Mrs. Reed herself, at far intervals, visited it to review the contents of a certain secret drawer in the wardrobe, where were stored divers parchments, her jewel-casket, and a miniature of her deceased husband; and in those last words lies the secret of the bed-room – the spell which kept it so lonely in spite of its grandeur [6, p. 7].

In this example the word *furniture* is hyperonym of such hyponyms as *bed*, *table*, *wardrobe*, *toilet-table*, *chairs*, *footstool*, and the word *colour* includes in itself *pink*, *white*, *pale*. By means of these thematic groups of words, the writer describes the place in detail.

Another important stylistic device is periphrasis which expresses objects and events of the reality indirectly, through description which owns expressive and evaluative features.

Charles Bally in his work “French Stylistics” considers this term as a different form of the idea. He explains the reason of different types of repetitions with the author’s intention to be in contact with his reader. He defines: “Expanded form of the repetition of the thought is called periphrasis. This term should be understood as a figurative expression of the thought” (the translation from Russian is made by the author of the article. – *Ed.*) [4, p. 126].

...Mrs. Reed was a woman of robust frame, square-shouldered and strong-limbed, not tall, and, though stout, not obese: ... illness never came near her [6, p. 20].

I. R. Galperin says: “Periphrasis realizes the quality of the language to give new names to the objects by showing the certain features of it. This kind of naming expresses figuratively, and can be the unique representative in the speech referring to the initial name of the object in the language system” [5, p. 167].

One afternoon, ... my eyes, raised in abstraction to the window, caught sight of a figure just passing [6, p. 36].

“Take your hand away,” Ferguson said. Her face was red. “If you had any shame it would be different. But you’re God knows how many months gone with a child and you think it’s a joke and are all smiles because your seducer’s come back. You’ve no shame and no feelings.” She began to cry. Catherine went over and put her arm around her. As she stood confronting Ferguson, I could see no change in her figure [9, p. 219].

Based on Ch. Bally and I. R. Galperin it can once more be proved that periphrasis owns contextual synonymous function. If a writer or a speaker wants to use periphrasis they should certainly have knowledge about synonyms.

Books were beyond her interest-knowledge a sealed book. In the intuitive graces she was still crude [8, p. 4].

In this example the part of *Books were beyond her interest* may be paraphrased as *She wasn't interested in books*, without any changes in the meaning.

The more skillful speakers or writers are to use periphrasis in order to influence or inspire their audience, and create logical connection the more successful their works will be. If the written context or speech is described with periphrasis, it is easy for a reader or a listener to comprehend the content. The main purpose of periphrasis is to raise expressiveness of a text, and to prove the authenticity of thoughts. *He writes short stories = he is a writer of short stories; he sold me a book for 2 dollars = I bought a book from him for 2 dollars; he is never present when he needed most = he is always absent when needed most.*

So periphrasis as well as euphemisms, hyponyms, synonyms keep the reader's attention to the theme, and serve for the enrichment and enlargement of the thoughts. They give new effects and additional details to the information.

RESOURCES

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The present article deals with such contextual equivalents of synonyms as euphemisms, hyponyms, hyperonyms and periphrases. The importance and degree of expressiveness of different words with the same meanings have found their proofs with examples from different sources. These examples show the valuable opportunities of synonyms and their equivalents.

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