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# SHIFTS OF LEXICAL UNITS INTO OTHER SEMANTIC GROUPS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE: MECHANISMS AND OUTCOMES

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**Abstract**: The study explores the processes of a semantic shift, in which one lexical unit moves into another semantic group. Cognitive mechanisms, including metaphor, metonymy, and generalization, were examined. The linguistic consequences of this phenomenon for modern English were analyzed.

**Keywords:** semantic shift, lexical unit, semantic group, metaphor, metonymy.

First, it should be noted that the dynamics of language as a living system are manifested, in particular, in the simple change of word meanings. The move of lexical units from one semantic group into another is a fundamental mechanism of linguistic evolution and vocabulary enrichment. Modern English, as a global means of communication, demonstrates an incredibly high rate and diversity of such changes. Understanding the mechanisms that cause lexical shifts is crucial for lexicology, cognitive linguistics, and intercultural communication.

Therefore, it is essential to examine the linguo-cognitive mechanisms underlying the shift of lexical units into other semantic groups in the English language and to evaluate the impact of this phenomenon on its systemic organization.

In this regard, it is appropriate to identify the key cognitive mechanisms of semantic shift, classify the types of semantic displacement exemplified by modern English vocabulary, and analyze the influence of cultural and social factors on these processes.

The theoretical foundations of semantic shift involve a semantic field (or group) definition as a set of lexical units connected by an ordinary meaning or idea [1, p. 25]. A lexical unit that belongs to one group (for example, "means of communication") may acquire a new meaning that places it into another group (for instance, "emotional state"). This process is known as a semantic shift or semantic derivation.

It is worth noting that the cognitive mechanisms underlying semantic shifts are deeply rooted in human thought. The transfer of a name from one object or phenomenon to another based on the similarity of features is one of them [2, p. 5]. It is the most productive mechanism, often leading to the transition of words between distant semantic groups. For example, the word *"virus"* (semantic group "diseases") has shifted to the group "software/threats" while preserving the key idea of "invisible, harmful replication."

Metonymy is the transfer of a name based on the contiguity of concepts (a part instead of the whole, the content instead of the form, the author instead of the work). For example, the word *"mouth"* (group "parts of the body") may shift into the group "a person who speaks or represents" (e.g., *the mouth of the government*), preserving the connection between the organ and its function.

Synecdoche is a type of metonymy in which a shift occurs between "part → whole" or "general → specific", which often leads to generalization (e.g., *"to trade"* formerly meant "to barter, to travel a certain route," but now means "to do business in general").

Shifts of lexical units can be classified according to their direction:

• *Shift into the abstract sphere.* Words denoting definite objects tend to group with those associated with emotions, ideas, or processes.

For example, *"to grasp"* – group "physical action/seizing" → "to understand" (group "cognitive processes"). This phenomenon is a metaphorical shift based on the analogy between physically grasping an object and mentally grasping an idea.

• *Shift into the sphere of social relations.* It is characteristic of vocabulary related to technology, economics, and politics.

For example, *"network"* – group "structures/technology" → "circle of communication/business connections" (group "social relations"). This is a metaphor reflecting structural similarity.

• *Shift into evaluative/emotional sphere.* A change in meaning from neutral or positive to negative (pejoration) or vice versa (amelioration), often accompanied by a transition into a new semantic group.

For example, *"awful"* (old meaning "inspiring respect/reverence" – group "religious/intense feelings") → "nasty" (group "negative evaluation"). Here we observe a pejorative shift.

• *Shift under the influence of technological progress.* It is caused by a constant flow of neologisms and the reinterpretation of old words [2, p. 71].

For example, *"feed"* (group "food/feeding") → "news or content stream" (group "information flow"). This metaphor reflects the idea of continuous "nourishment" with information.

The process of semantic substitution is not purely linguistic; it directly correlates with extralinguistic factors such as:

• *Sociocultural changes.* The emergence of new realities requires new names. The economy of linguistic effort leads to the use of already existing words through metaphor or metonymy.

For example, the development of computer technology has led to the words *"mouse," "window,"* and *"folder"* being grouped into a new semantic category.

• *Slang and jargon.* A specific role in this context is played by slang and jargon. The creation of slang is often based on pejoration or playful metaphors, which causes a rapid, though often temporary, shift in meanings.

For example, *"sick"* (group "diseases") → "impressive/excellent" (group "evaluation").

• *Globalization.* It is also important to consider the factor of globalization. The English language borrows concepts and words from other cultures, which in turn affects the formation of new semantic groups or shifts in existing ones. Although the primary process here is borrowing, it can lead to secondary semantic shifts in the

recipient's language.

Lexical shifts also lead to polysemy and homonymy. The increase in the number of meanings of a word (polysemy) complicates automated language processing, yet it also makes the language more flexible and expressive. The transition of a word into another group may result in the development of a connection between its primary and secondary meanings, creating new homonyms [6, p. 18]. This phenomenon serves as evidence of the creativity and economy of the language system.

**Conclusion**. Thus, definite conclusions have been drawn: regarding the role of semantic shift, and further research issues on the topic.

The semantic displacement of lexical units into other semantic groups is an integral and continuous process in the English language, reflecting the interaction between cognitive, social, and cultural factors.

Metaphor and metonymy serve as the primary cognitive mechanisms of this process, providing a connection between old and new concepts. Lexical movement may occur in the direction from the definite to the abstract, within the sphere of social relations or evaluation, as well as under the influence of technological progress.

This phenomenon is a key source of polysemy and vocabulary enrichment, enabling the language to adapt to a changing world. Further research should focus on a quantitative analysis of the frequency of different types of shifts in modern English corpora, as well as on the study of the impact of digital communication on the speed and nature of semantic change.

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