

Lecture 1: Fundamentals of Lexicology

1. The Object of Lexicology and its Connection with Other Branches of Linguistics
2. Two Approaches to Language Study
3. Methods of Linguistic Analysis
4. The Perspectives of Modern English Lexicology

1. The Object of Lexicology and its Connection with Other Branches of Linguistics

Lexicology derives from two Greek words **lexis** "word" and **logos** "learning". It is a branch of Linguistics dealing with the vocabulary system of the language. It studies the total sum of all the words that the language possesses. Thus, this science studies the properties of the words as the basic units of the language.

The **word** can be defined as a structural and semantic entity of the language system. The word is simultaneously a semantic, grammatical and phonological unit. Lexicology studies various lexical units: words, variable word-groups, phraseological units, and morphemes which make up words. The word as well as any linguistic sign is a two-faced unit possessing both form and content or in other words sound-form and meaning.

The term **vocabulary** means the total sum of words that there are in the language. The size of the vocabulary of any language is huge. No person can learn or know all the words of the language. Individual people possess their own total vocabulary consisting of all the words they know. Another word used to denote vocabulary is the term **lexicon**. In modern Linguistics three main meanings of the term lexicon are distinguished: 1) the vocabulary which a speaker of a language has in his or her head, that is, **mental lexicon**; 2) the set of lexemes of a language and the processes which are related to them; 3) the set of lexical items of a language.

Distinction is made between **General Lexicology and Special Lexicology**. General lexicology is a part of General linguistics. It is concerned with the study of vocabulary and its basic units, irrespective of the specific features of any particular language. It works out basic notions and methods of vocabulary study. Within the frames of General Lexicology many notions, such as the notion of the word, the notion of the meaning, the notion of the context, the notion of system relations are investigated. Special lexicology is the lexicology of a particular language (English, Russian, German, French, etc.). It describes words and vocabulary of one particular language. Every Special Lexicology is based on the principles of General Lexicology. Special Lexicology is further subdivided into **Diachronic/Historical** and **Synchronic/Descriptive**. Historical Lexicology deals with the evolution of any vocabulary, the origin of words, their change and development. The subject matter of Descriptive Lexicology is the vocabulary of a particular language at a given stage of its development. It studies mainly the structure and specific functions of words.

There are different aspects or branches of Lexicology. Any language is the unity of different aspects: grammar, vocabulary, and sound system. As Lexicology is the science that deals with vocabulary systems, it is definitely connected with all the rest of the aspects. Lexicology is linked with **phonetics** since the latter is concerned with the study of the sound-form of the word. There is a close relationship between

Lexicology and **Grammar**. Grammar is concerned with various means of expressing grammatical relations between words as well as with patterns according to which words are combined into word-groups and sentences. Lexicology is bound up with **Stylistics** since there are problems of meaning, vocabulary stratification, style treated in the frames of both the branches. The structure of words is studied by **morphology**. Ways of coining new words is the object of **word-building**, meaning of words, their relations in vocabulary became the object of **semasiology**. Set-expressions and idioms are studied by **phraseology**, the origin of words, their development in the language are dealt with **etymology** and the behaviour of words in speech is considered by **contextology**.

2. Two Approaches to Language Study

There are two principle approaches in linguistic science to the study of language material: **synchronic and diachronic**. With regard to Special lexicology the **synchronic** approach is concerned with the vocabulary of a language as it exists at a given time. It's Special Descriptive lexicology that deals with the vocabulary and vocabulary units of a particular language at a certain time.

The **diachronic** approach in terms of Special lexicology deals with the changes and the development of vocabulary in the course of time. It is Special Historical lexicology that deals with the evaluation of the vocabulary units of a language as the time goes by.

The two approaches shouldn't be set one against the other. In fact, they are interconnected and interrelated because every linguistic structure and system exists in a state of constant development, so that the synchronic state of a language system is a result of a long process of linguistic evaluation, of its historical development. Closely connected with the Historical lexicology is Contrastive and Comparative lexicology whose aims are to study the correlation between the vocabularies of two or more languages and find out the correspondences between the vocabulary units of the languages under comparison.

3. Methods of Linguistic Analysis

Every science has certain methods of investigation at its disposal. The process of scientific investigation may be subdivided into several phases:

- **Observation** is the basic phase of all modern scientific investigations including linguistics. In other words, we deal with the inductive method of inquiry. The key role of the opening phase of linguistic analysis is that the statements of fact must be based on observation, not on unsupported authority, logical conclusions or personal preferences.

- **Classification** is the second phase that comes after observation. Every lexicological research is based on collecting linguistic examples. At this stage of linguistic analysis the stored facts, the collected data, and empirical material undergo some grouping.

- **Generalization** is the third stage of the linguistic analysis at which the collection of data and their classification must eventually lead to the formulation of a hypotheses, rule, or law.

- **Verification** is the phase of linguistic analysis that leads to the results of the scientific investigation.

While doing research, any linguist encounters all the phases of investigation. To accomplish his goal the linguist uses different methods and procedures. They are contrastive analyses, statistical analyses, method of immediate constituents, distributional analyses, transformational analyses, componential analyses, and method of semantic differentiation.

Contrastive analysis is aimed at finding out similarities and differences in both related and non-related languages. For instance, contrastive analysis is applied in language teaching when we deal with such a phenomenon as linguistic interference. It was empirically shown that the mistakes which are made by foreign language students can be often the result of differences in structural patterns between the target language and the language of the learner. This naturally implies the necessity of a detailed comparison of the structure of a mother tongue and a foreign language. Contrastive analysis can be carried out at three linguistic levels: phonology, grammar and lexis.

Statistical analysis is generally referred to as one of the principal branches of linguistics. Insights derived from statistical accounts of the vocabulary can be useful to the solution and clarification of specific problems connected with the qualitative and quantitative language use. Statistical inquiries have considerable importance because of their relevance to certain problems of the selection of vocabulary items for the purposes of language usage and language teaching. For instance, very few people know more than 10 % of the words in their mother tongue. During the day we usually pronounce about 48 000 words. We can survive in the alien environment using only 500 different words of the foreign language. It means that if we do not wish to waste time on committing to memorize vocabulary items, which are never likely to be useful to the learner, we have to select only lexical units that are commonly used by a native speaker. In Modern Linguistics the issue of **Basic/Nuclear English** was investigated. Basic English was a project designed to provide a basic minimum vocabulary for the learning of general English. The project involved a word list of 850 words, the description of their functions and the relationships between them. Statistical regularities can be observed only if the phenomena under analysis are sufficiently numerous. Thus, the first requirement of any statistic investigation is the size of the sample material.

Method of Immediate Constituents (метод непосредственных составляющих) was attempted to determine the ways in which lexical units are relevantly related to one another. It was discovered and illustrated that linguistic units have a hierarchical organization of binary constructions. The fundamental task of the method is to segment a set of lexical units into two maximally independent meaningful sequences. These independent meaningful sequences are called immediate constituents. The further segmentation of immediate constituents results in ultimate constituents, which means that no further semantic segmentation is possible for no meaning can be found. This method is extremely fruitful in discovering the derivational structure of words. For example,

Исподнизу
Испод + низу
Ис + под низ +у

Возможно только такое деление, т.к. *ис+поднизу* не существуют как самостоятельные части языка.

Distributional analysis. By the term “distribution” we understand the occurrence of a lexical unit relative to another lexical units of the same levels: words to words , morpheme to morphemes. In other words, by this term we understand the position which lexical unit occupies or may occupy in the text or in the flow of speech. It is established that a certain component of the word-meaning is described when the word is identified distributionally. For example, in the sentence *The boy _____ home* the form which is missing is easily identified as a verb but not a noun, an adjective or an adverb. Thus, contextually only several verbs or rather word-forms can be inserted in the space: *goes, comes, runs, went, came, ran*. Thus, we see that the component of meaning that is distributionally identified is actually the part-of-speech meaning. It is also observed that in a number of cases words have different lexical meanings in different distributional patterns. e. g. The verb “to treat” has different lexical meanings in “to treat smbd kindly” & “to treat smbd to ice-cream”.

Transformational analysis in lexicological investigations may be defined as repatterning of various distributional structures in order to discover difference or sameness of meaning of practically identical distributional patterns. Transformational analysis can be applied to reveal the difference in meaning in the example:

He made the boy a pipe —> He made a pipe for the boy.

He made the girl a star — He made a star for the girl.*

In the first example the transformation is possible and the meaning of the transformed sentence has not been changed. In the second case the transformation is impossible because it completely changes the meaning of the utterance. Types of transformation differ according to purposes for which transformations are used:

- **Permutation** - the repatterning on condition that the basic subordinative relationships between words and word-stems of the lexical units are not changed. For example, *"His work is excellent"* may be transformed into *"his excellent work, the excellence of his work, he works excellently "*.

- **Replacement** - the substitution of a component of the distributional structure by a member of a certain strictly defined set of lexical units (replacement of a notional verb by an auxiliary or link verb).

- **Addition (or expansion)** may be illustrated by the application of the procedure of addition to the classification of adjectives into two groups-adjectives denoting inherent and non-inherent qualities: *John is happy. John is tall* .We add a phrase *in Moscow* to the first sentence and get *John is happy in Moscow*. If we add the same phrase to the second sentence, it will become senseless. That is accounted by the difference in the meaning of adjectives denoting inherent (tall) and non-inherent (happy) qualities.

- **Deletion** is a procedure which shows whether one of the words is semantically subordinated to the other. For instance, the word-group *yellow tulips* may be further segmented and transformed into *tulips* without making the sentence

senseless / *like yellow tulips* or / *like tulips*. The other word-group *red tape* can't be transformed either into / *hate tape* or / *hate red* because we won't convey the meaning of the expression *red tape* (bureaucracy) in both transformed sentences because it functions as an inseparable phrase in the language.

Componential analysis

Componential analysis refers to a technique for describing relations of meaning by breaking down each word into the smallest units of meaning which are known as sememes or semes. The componential analysis is central to the conceptual area of semantics. The semantic features in lexical items are universal and they underlie our basic cognitive process for the ordering of meaning. The central part of componential analysis is the concept of binarism. Semantic features are marked on the basis of semantic opposition or contrast. For example, in the lexical item *woman* several sememes may be singled out, such as *human, adult, female*. The analysis of the word *man* will show the following sememes: *human, adult, male*.

<u>Man</u>	<u>Woman</u>
human	human
adult	adult
male	female

The last component differentiates them and makes impossible to mix up the words in the process of communication.

Componential analysis is concerned with the sense relations between lexical items covered by such traditional terms as synonymy, antonymy. Componential analysis is practically always combined with transformational procedures or statistical analysis.

Method of semantic differential was worked out by a group of American psycholinguists. Words may have more than one meaning. Even one word usually implies some additional information which differentiates one word from another, that is the connotational aspect of the word. The technique of the semantic differential requires the subjects to judge - a series of concepts with respect to a set of antonymic adjective scale.

e. g., *A horse can be:*

good — bad fast — slow strong - weak
hard — soft happy - sad

The meaning of the divisions is that each of the quality may be gradated representing extremely good, very good, neither good nor bad, slightly bad, extremely bad, and these grades can be marked by a plus. *And the horse may be very good, not bad, etc.*

The combination of different methods of analysis helps to classify the vocabulary as a whole and each lexical unit taken separately. It should be noted that one cannot investigate one side of the item paying no attention to the other one.

4. The Perspectives of Modern English Lexicology

Lexicology has its own main aims and tasks. Modern English lexicology investigates the problem of word structure and word formation, the classification of vocabulary units, description of the relations between different lexical layers of English vocabulary. As a science it has both theoretical and practical use. The

theoretical value of Lexicology stems from the theory of meaning which was originally developed within the philosophical science. The relationship between the name and the thing constitutes one of the key questions of Gnostic theories. The research carried out in the frames of Lexicology meets the needs of many different sciences, such as lexicography, literary criticism, and foreign languages teaching.

Modern English Lexicology aims at giving a systematic description of the Modern English word-stock. Modern English Lexicology investigates the problems of word-structure and word formation in Modern English, the semantic structure of English words, the main principles underlying the classification of vocabulary units into various groupings, the laws governing the replenishment of the vocabulary with new vocabulary units.

Modern English Lexicology forms part of the Theoretical Course of Modern English. It is inseparable from its other component parts, i.e., Grammar, Phonetics, Stylistics, the Course of History of the English Language.

Moreover, the Course of Modern English Lexicology is of great practical importance because it is aimed both at summarising the practical material already familiar to the students from foreign language classes and at helping the students to develop the skills and habits of generalising the linguistic phenomena.

QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of the term 'Lexicology'?
2. What is the subject matter of Lexicology?
3. What does the term 'word' denote?
4. What is the term 'vocabulary' used to denote?
5. What are the definitions of the term 'lexicon'?
6. What do General Lexicology and Special Lexicology study?
7. What branches of Linguistics is Lexicology closely connected with?
8. What are the general approaches to the study of language material?
9. What are the principal methods of scientific investigation?
10. What are all kinds of the analysis aimed at? Characterise each.