ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКАЯ, ПРИКЛАДНАЯ И СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО-СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНАЯ ЛИНГВИСТИКА / THEORETICAL, APPLIED AND COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS

WORD-MEANING CHANGING PROCESS (BASED ON AN IDIOM ANALYSIS)

Research article

Shirlina Y.N.[1], Buzinova L.M.[2], Koch K.I.[3], *
[1] ORCID : 0000-0001-7397-6985;
[2] ORCID : 0000-0002-2721-3482;
[3] ORCID : 0000-0002-9153-0239;
[1] Moscow Timiryazev Agricultural Academy, Moscow, Russian Federation
[2] Moscow International University, Moscow, Russian Federation
[3] Russian State Social University, Moscow, Russian Federation

* Corresponding author (karina010990[at]mail.ru)

Abstract

The article deals with the features of such a linguistic phenomenon as the change in the word-meaning on the example of the English language. Using a complex model of methodology based on a combination of system analysis, semantic and component analysis, as well as the method of phraseological identification, the authors identify key processes in the course of changing the word-meaning in the English language using the example of idioms. The change in word-meaning is dictated, on the one hand, by the influence of extra linguistic factors, including the processes of historical and cultural interaction, social factors influence; and, on the other hand, by linguistic reasons, the most productive of them is the linguistic analogy. The research work stresses that the influence of extra linguistic factors, namely the change in the socio-cultural characteristics of society to a greater extent, influenced the process of changing the word-meaning. It is proved that over time, words in the English language have changed their meaning to an antonymic one. Word-meaning changing can be of two types: expanding the word-meaning and narrowing the word-meaning. It has been proved that the expansion of the word-meaning is more productive for modern British English and American English. The analysis of the change in the word-meaning on the example of idioms functioning in British English and American English variant proved the possibility of preserving the original meaning of some lexical units within phraseological units, which is dictated by the specific possibility of idioms to preserve the original linguistic and cultural meaning of some words.

Keywords: word-meaning changing, the expansion of the word-meaning, narrowing of word-meaning, idioms, British English, American English.

ИЗМЕНЕНИЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЯ СЛОВА (НА ОСНОВЕ АНАЛИЗА ФРАЗЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ЕДИНИЦ)

Научная статья

Ширлина Е.Н.[1], Бузинова Л.М.[2], Коч К.И.[3], *
[1] ORCID : 0000-0001-7397-6985;
[2] ORCID : 0000-0002-2721-3482;
[3] ORCID : 0000-0002-9153-0239;
[1] Российский государственный аграрный университет - МСХА имени К.А. Тимирязева, Москва, Российская Федерация
[2] Московский международный университет, Москва, Российская Федерация
[3] Российский государственный социальный университет, Москва, Российская Федерация

* Корреспондирующий автор (karina010990[at]mail.ru)

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются особенности такого лингвистического явления, как изменение значения слова, на примере английского языка. Используя комплексную модель методологии, базирующуюся на сочетании системного анализа, семантического и компонентного анализа, метода фразеологической идентификации, авторы выявляют ключевые процессы в ходе изменения значения слова в английском языке на примере фразеологических единиц. Изменение значения слова продиктовано, с одной стороны, влиянием экстралингвистических факторов, к которым относятся процессы исторического и культурного взаимодействия и социальные причины; и, с другой стороны, лингвистическими причинами, наиболее продуктивными из которых является лингвистическая аналогия. В ходе исследования выявлено, что влияние экстралингвистических факторов, а именно изменение социокультурной характеристики общества в большей степени повлияло на процесс изменения значения слова. Доказано, что со временем слова в английском языке изменили свое значение на антонимичное. Изменение значения слова может проходить по нескольким направлениям: расширение значения слова и сужение значения слова. Было доказано, что расширение значения слова в большей степени продуктивно для современного британского английского языка и американского варианта английского языка. Анализ изменения значения слова на примере идиом, функционирующих в британском английском и американском варианте английского языка, доказал возможность сохранения исходного значения некоторых лексических единиц в рамках фразеологических единиц, что продиктовано специфической возможностью фразеологизмов сохранять исходное языковое и культурное значение некоторых слов.

Ключевые слова: изменение значения слова, расширение значения слова, фразеологическая единица, британский английский язык, американский варианта английского языка.

Introduction

The question of word-meaning changing or semantic shift has been discussed in works by many linguists. Dr. Santosh Kumar Nayak in his work "Change of Meaning in Language: Directions and Dimensions" stresses that "every word of any language has a variety of senses and connotations which can be altered, substituted, added, removed, or improved over time" [7, P. 4200]. The spectrum of language functions is unlimited: social, cultural, expressive, etc.

Asma Neelam in her research work "Exploring The Dilemma of Hybrid Identity: A Case Study of "Gogol" In Jhumpa Lahiri's Novel "The Namesake"" analyses the peculiarities of changing the word-meaning in the multi linguistic environment and stresses the influence of word adaptation procedure to local cultures peculiarities [8]. Actual ideas of semantic processes have been investigated in the work "Current Trends in Diachronic Semantics and Pragmatics" by Maj-Britt Mosegaard Hansen and Jacqueline Visconti. Linguists pay special attention to the process of changing semantics in historical development of understanding [4].

Language shape is formulated by means of external and internal factors. Extra linguistic reasons for changing the word-meaning include the influence of historical, cultural, social and psychological aspects. Of great importance is the historical principle of changing word-meaning when new meaning ideas appeared in the language due to scientific researches, electrical engineering development which resulted in the language as well, for example:

· "core" which originally meant "the part of a fruit" but then had a new idea – "the centre of an induction coil";

· "mouse" was firstly used to describe an animal and then changed the meaning to a technical device to the computer or laptop.

Social factors are the reason of changing word-meaning being used by a specific social group, for example by representatives of young generation:

· "cool" was originally used meaning "a little bit cold" but then was changed to "great" by teenagers and then by other age groups as well.

Psychological reasons for changing word-meaning include euphemistic substitutions, for example:

· crisis – depression,

· starvation – undernourishment, etc.

The list of linguistic reasons for changing the word-meaning includes the struggle of synonyms, ellipsis, linguistic analogy.

In our research work, we analyse the word-meaning changing on the example of British English and American English variant to follow the traces of semantic shift.

Main results

The practical part of our research work deals with the analysis of extra linguistic and linguistic factors to reveal main aspect of word-meaning changings in English. The examples of word-meaning changing in our research work have been chosen according to the principle of productivity in British English and American English variant.

Historical change of word-meaning is explained by the new level of cultural adaptation to new social needs. British English has undergone several cultural changes due to the migrations processes and the need to be more tolerant providing equal rights to all citizens and migrants as well [10].

Tolerance policy aimed at equality to people of all nationalities is the reason of word-meaning changing, for example:

· Nice:

The adjective "nice" is a highly-productive word in British English and American English variant. Originally the word "nice" was used to describe a person who was silly and even foolish in British culture. The definition "nice" in XIX century emphasized the limited mental abilities of a person, on the one hand, and his inability to adapt to difficult living conditions, on the other hand, which was taken crucially in Britain society as all children were brought up to be suitable for all life difficulties. Originally, the word was morphed from Old English word close to meanings: "blessed", "week" or even "innocent", therefore, there were and are several meanings aspects.

In the XX century this adjective was used to describe someone who had difficulties with mental capacities. In the end of XX century the definition "nice" changed the lexical meaning to the antonym and is used now in order to depict a person who has attractive appearance and who is easy-going, for example:

*"Look! How **nice** she is!"* [1, P. 23]

Modern English has many idioms with the adjective "nice", meaning "something good" or someone "attractive". The positive meaning can be traced in idioms: *"Sugar and spice and make everything **nice**"; "Be as **nice** as pie"; "Make **nice-nice**"; "**Nice** guys finish last"*:

*"You're so sad! Sugar and spice and make everything **nice**"* [2] (=*everything will be fine*)

This example shows the recommendation to the friend to be optimistic by the idiom *"Sugar and spice and make everything **nice**"*.

*"Be hardworking and polite and be as **nice** as pie to impress the Boss"* [11] *(=polite)*

The example depicts the best working strategy to impress the Boss - *be as nice as pie* which means to be easy-going.

In American English variant there is the idiom *"to be a **nice** touch"* which is used to describe a minor but pleasant way to make something enjoyable.

· Unbelievable:

Originally the word "unbelievable" was used directly depicting a person unable to believe. Such person was unreliable, so one could not trust him. Today the meaning has been changed into "impressive" or "very good":

*I wonna date with her. She's so **unbelievable*** [3, P. 47] (= impressed me much)

Modern American English has such idioms with the adjective "unbelievable" as *"**unbelievable** truth"* and *"**unbelievable** truth song"* which are used synonymously:

*No! It's just **unbelievable** truth song! No one will believe you* [11]. (=can not be true)

Modern British English has borrowed the idiom *"**unbelievable** truth"* from American English which is very productive nowadays.

· Dumb:

The adjective "dumb" was originally used to mention the person with physical disability as he could not hear. Furthermore, this word had additional meaning and described a man who had no desire to speak. So such person was speechless. Today in British culture the definition "dump" has another meaning, it depicts a person who is silly but says many foolish things, it would be better for him no to say anything at all – to be silent, for example:

*He's **dumb**! His silly jokes …I'm sick of it* [4]. (=silly)

The word-meaning change of the word "dump" is dictated by linguistic reasons – desire to be tolerant and use euphemisms for softening the meaning. Today it's rude to use the adjective "dump" in old meaning.

The meaning of the word "dump" has been extended in informal language. This word is used in British English idioms, such as *"to be a **dump**"* describing a room in a mess, for example:

*No, it's a **dump**! It's impossible to find anything in this room, Michael!* [6] (=the room is untidy)

For American English the noun "dump" in informal communication is used offensively and even in the derogatory way, insulting the interlocutor, for example:

*He's **dump**! No need to talk to him!* [11] (=stupid)

American English has many idioms with the word "dump" such as:

· *"to take a **dump**"* - to leave somebody after having private relations;
· *"to be sort of **dumped**"* – to be unreliable person;
· *"to **dump**"* – to vomit;
· *"**dump**"* – cheap establishment:

*I can't believe he **dumped** me!* [6] (=left me)

*You should never deal with him he is a sort of **dumped*** [11]. (=unreliable person)

*He cannot be at work today. He's **dumping**!* [9] (=vomits)

*This summer vocation will be awful. Mom sent me to **dump*** [5] (=cheap camp)

*Get rid of it now! Just **dump** it* [11] (=throw away)

The idiom *"to **dump**"* meaning "to vomit" is used among American young generation predominantly.

· Awful:

The adjective "awful" presents one more example of complete word-change to the opposite through times. Up to XIX century the word "awful" meant "worthy of respect", "impressive" or "great". In the middle of XX century it changed the meaning to several aspects: it could be used negatively or positively – "worth being respected or not". In the middle of XX century this word has changed the meaning to antonym and is used only negatively – "something that is disgusting":

*No, I don't like this **awful** meal. Gruesome!* [6] (=disgusting)

The adjective "awful" is a part of such idiom as "*an **awful** excuse for something*" which is used to describe something or somebody absolutely inappropriate for doing something, for example:

*Who can hire such employee? He's just **an awful excuse for** being a manager* [3, P. 48] (=he should not work as a manager, he can do nothing)

· Fizzle:

The word "fizzle" was initially used as "a sound of any kind of gas" in British English. It was used to describe a kind of "noise while opening a bottle with carbonated drink". Later it had additional meaning – "a kind of gas of a human body", especially in informal communication. Nowadays the word "fizzle" in British English has extended its meaning and is used covering all types of technical problems, stressing the idea of not working properly:

*I don't know what happened to my car! It just **fizzle*** [11] (=doesn't work)

Modern American English has an idiom with the word "fizzle", such as "fizzle out" which means "to weaken over the time":

*I couldn't have thought this question will **fizzle out*** [10, P. 121] (=will become unnecessary soon).

· Glamour:

Today the common association with the noun "glamour" is "luxury" and "splendour" like it is represented in many Hollywood films, but originally it was used in British English to refer to "a magical enchantment". The adjective "glamour" is used in idioms of modern American English, for example, "glamour puss". It should be noted, nowadays the noun "glamour" is frequently used in British English and in American English variant. This idiom describes a person who has a beautiful face, for example:

*I'm not a beauty, but I am really a **glamour puss*** [6] (=I have a beautiful face)

· Mad:

The word "mad" in British English of XIX century depicted a person who had serious mental problems and even had to be taken to insane asylum. If asked "Are you mad?" it was taken as offense. The meaning of the analysed word has not only been softened with times but changed completely according to the social factors. Since the end of XX century the meaning of the adjective "mad" has been extended in British English and American English variant and is used like a compliment to someone stressing his uniqueness and individuality. Often this expression is used among teenagers, for example:

***Mad** Skills, bro!* [11] *(=cool)*

We must stress the adjective "mad" is very productive in idioms of British English and American English. It has many synonyms, for example: *"to be (as) **mad** as a bear with a sore head", "(as) **mad** as a wet hen", "(as) **mad** as a snake", "be hopping **mad**"* – all these variants of the idiom depict extremely irritated person; "*all over the place like a **mad** woman's custard*" – to be out of control.

Example:

*John is as **mad** as a bear with a sore head!* [6] (=furious)

*I cannot talk to her. She's all over the place like a **mad** woman's custard* [2] (=she can't control her emotions).

· Sick:

The adjective "sick" was used in the past centuries in British English to denote a person who was ill severely. It was not a kind of slight physical malaise but complex disease. Then the word "sick" has extended its meaning firstly in American English and then in British English and was used to note something or someone who is really "great" or "cool", especially among teenagers:

*Wow! Annette is **sick!** Amazing!* [8] (=Annette looks gorgeous)

The adjective "sick" is as a part of many idioms: "*feel **sick** at heart*" which means "to feel grief"; "*hope deferred makes the heart **sick***" is a proverb describing the process of waiting which can be very tiring:

*Poor Mabel, she felt **sick** at heart since the moment when her mom died* [10] (=she was grieving)

*Rachel is so anxious, this hope deferred makes the heart **sick*** [4] (=this waiting process makes her tired).

Often the adjective "sick" in idioms is used to describe a sad, disappointed person, and has many synonymous analogues, for example: "*(as) **sick** as a parrot*", "*(as) **sick** as a pig*":

*Andrew was as **sick** as a parrot when he heard he would be fired* [2] (=was very upset)

The idiom "*a one **sick** puppy*" is used to describe someone who speaks or acts with gruesome manner, for example:

*Lily is a **sick** puppy, I will never speak to her again!* [8] (=very rude)

· Wench:

Originally the noun "wench" was used only in British English describing a newly born child. It was of no gender marker: it could be a boy as well as a girl. Later, it got gender identity and was used only for males, denoting "a small boy" or "the male student". In the middle of XX century under the influence of American culture the word "wench" had the new meaning – "maid" or "assistant helper", it was used only for females.

· Fathom:

The noun "fathom" has long and interesting tradition in the British English language and culture. Firstly, it was the element of measurement system – "Fathom" – a part of a hand. Secondly, when the system of measurements was changed due to the progress (there was no need to use hands to measure something) the word changed its meaning to "wrap your mind around" and then to "use your brains to do something":

***Fathom** yourself! Start earning for your living* [7].

But we must mention that there is still such traditional measurement system as "Fathom", so the word has traditional meaning and narrow meaning. The word "Fathom" functions predominantly in British English as it connected with British history and culture symbiosis.

· Clue:

The original meaning of the noun "clue" represented a kind of substance, a thread or a rope which was used by a man leaving his house to hunt in the forest. The thread was used to show the way back to his house. Often it was the winding road, and the hunter could come back due to this kind of help. The word-meaning of the noun "clue" has been narrowed and within years denoted the way out of difficult situation. Nowadays the word "clue" has the meaning of "a small action", or "a kind of suggestion" in British English and American English, for example:

*To run the report, follow the manual **clue!*** [11]

Conclusion

Semantic shift presents a specific language phenomenon which is the reason of word-meaning changes. The reasons of word-meaning changes lie in extra linguistic and linguistic factors. According to analysis of word-meaning changes in modern British English and American English, extralinguistic factors are of more significant value, predominantly the historical development and social factors. Modern British English and American English have many words with lexical meaning substance being transformed by the extension of word-meaning into opposite ones. Modern processes of word-meaning changes start with American English variant predominantly used by young generation and then is transformed to British English. The original word-meaning sometimes can be traced by means of idioms, which have the unique opportunity to protect some cultural and linguistic elements and are able to save cultural heritage of original language.

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