

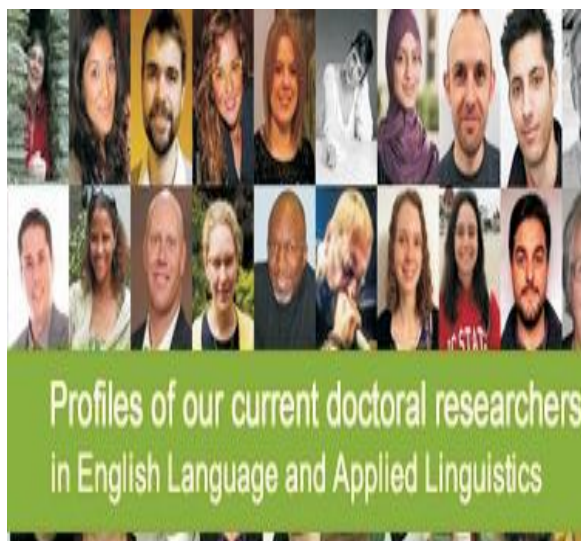
THE LINGUISTIC STUDY OF SENSE RELATIONS OF WORDS: A
TOOL BASED APPROACH FOR POSTGRADUATES
IN ENGLISH



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ABSTRACT

Semantics, the term coined by Bréal (1897) for the sub-discipline of linguistics concerned with the analysis and description of the so-called 'literal' meaning of linguistic expressions, is the top layer of the field of linguistics which is the scientific study of language. It is clear that an undergraduate in the course of linguistics has to develop the knowledge in semantics, too, to be successful in his academic and linguistic career. 'Sense relations' among words is one of the interest-evoking areas in semantics. Semantically, all words are related in one way or another. A word which is related to other words is related to them in sense, hence *sense relations*. For

example, the English words *bachelor* and *married* have the sense relationship of *bachelor = never married*. As far as the sense relations are concerned, the semanticists are interested in *synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, homonymy, hyponymy*, etc. These are the different forms or kinds reflecting sense relations. When a student is familiar with these forms, he or she will be able to not only get the knowledge in semantics but use the words properly in his linguistic communication in day today life, as well. Having kept this fact in mind, this paper attempts to develop a learning and testing tool regarding the study of sense relations of words in order to facilitate the students towards the field of linguistics especially the semantic domain.

KEYWORDS :linguistics, semantics, sense relations, synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, homonymy, hyponymy

1. INTRODUCTION :

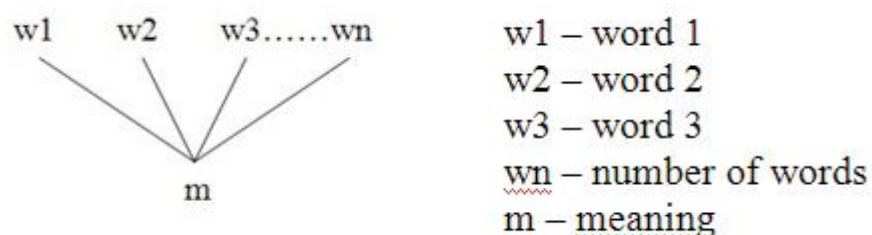
According to Frege (1892), *sense* is a term for the characteristic or quality of the object denoted by the linguistic expression. R.L.Trask (1999) says that sense relation is any of several ways in which the meanings of words may be related, i.e. the semantic relations between one word and another, or more generally between one linguistic unit and another. Further, words do not have meanings in isolation; instead, the meaning of a word is usually related in prominent ways to the meanings of other words. Some of the most importance of these relations in meaning are collectively known as sense relations, and there are several forms or kinds of sense relations which are *synonymy*,

antonymy, polysemy, homonymy, hyponymy, hypernymy, paronymy, meronymy, metonymy, holonymy, etc. The two most obvious sense relations are those of *sameness* and *oppositeness*, called *synonymy* and *antonymy* respectively. In this paper, these two sense relations are analyzed in detail.

Synonymy:

The term synonymy comes from a Greek word *sunonumon*, i.e. *syn* ‘with’ and *onoma* ‘name’ meaning having the same name. It is used in modern semantics to refer to a major type of sense relation between words, i.e. to refer to a relationship of sameness of meaning that may hold between two words. It is the relation between two (*happy-glad*) or among more words (*thrifty-economical-stingy*) which are related or identical to ‘one meaning’ (*designatum*). These words are called *synonyms* or *synonymous*. Maja (2009) has defined synonymy as the phenomenon of two or more different linguistic forms with the same meaning. Those linguistic forms are called synonyms, like *danger* and *risk*. Synonymy is a wide spread relation in English vocabulary for which good evidence is provided by the many synonym dictionaries and thesauruses (e.g. the Concise Oxford Thesauruses, Collins Thesauruses, etc.).

Palmer, F. R. (1996) and Lyons John (1996) state that synonymy is the sameness of meaning. Thus, the inter-lexical sense relation, i.e. synonymy, is diagrammatically shown below.



For example:

1. He *refused* her request to work in the project.
2. He *rejected* her request to work in the project.
3. He *declined* her request to work in the project.

The words *refused*, *rejected*, and *declined* in the above sentences are synonyms. Further, according to Palmer (1981), synonyms can differ in style according to the degree of formality: colloquial and formal (*buy and purchase/ gentleman and chap*), then connotations (*thrifty, economical, and stingy*), and dialectal aspects (*autumnBrE. and fallAmE. /flat and apartment / underground and tube*)

Synonyms can be any part of speech (such as *nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, or prepositions*), as long as both words belong to the same part of speech. For example:

- Nouns : *student and pupil / teacher and preacher*
 Verbs : *buy and purchase / motivate and encourage*
 Adjectives : *big and large / sick and ill*
 Adverbs : *quickly and speedily / happily and gladly*
 Prepositions : *on and upon / in and into*

It is noted that synonyms are defined with respect to certain senses of words; for instance, ‘*pupil*’ as in the sense of the “aperture in the iris of the eye” is not synonymous with ‘*student*’. Similarly, ‘*He expired*’ means the same as ‘*He died*’; yet ‘*My passport has expired*’ cannot be replaced by ‘*My passport has died*’.

Types of synonymy:

There are four types of synonymy: *absolute synonymy*, *near synonymy*, *partial synonymy*, and *total synonymy*.

Absolute Synonymy:

When two or more words are identical in all the three components (*designation*, *connotation* and *range of application*) of lexical meaning, it is called the *absolute synonymy*, i.e. the absolute synonyms are *mutually interchangeable* in all contexts.

e.g.

In English:

almost and *nearly* (Ullmann, 1962)

In Tamil:

urupaniyal and *colliyal* 'Morphology'

kuuRu and *collu* 'tell'

Further, some terms and almost always concrete words coming from linguistically disparate sources can be exemplified for the absolute synonyms like *celiac* (from Greek) and *abdominal* (from Latin); and *car* (from Latin) and *automobile* (from French). These meet the criteria for absolute synonymy, i.e. they have precisely the same denotations, connotations, and range of applicability; and they are used in identical contexts.

Near synonymy:

Synonyms which are identical in one or two components of meaning and different in the other, are called *near synonyms*. For example,

death and dying (identical in designative meaning, but different in connotation)

thrifty, *economical*, and *stingy* (identical in designative meaning, but different in connotation)

Near synonyms that have identical designation and range of application, but differ in connotation, are very common in languages. For example,

In English:

Prostitute (neutral)

Harlot (older literature)

Whore (derogatory)

In Tamil:

caappiTu (neutral)

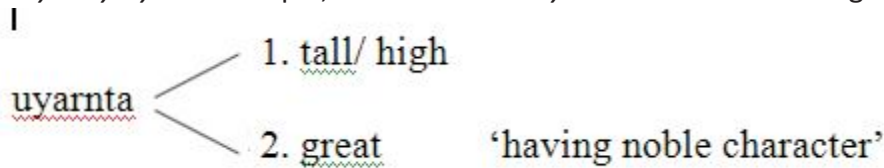
tinnu (derogatory)

amutupaNNu (social dialect-vaishnavite)

There are many occasions when one word is synonymous in a sentence, but sometimes its near synonym would be odd. For example, whereas the word *answer* fits in the sentence, '*Cajol had only one answer correct on the test*'; its near-synonym, *reply*, would sound odd, i.e. *'*Cajol had only one reply correct on the test*'.

Partial synonymy:

When a polysemous word is synonymous with another word, it may be only with reference to one of its meanings. It may not be synonymous with that word with reference to its other meanings. It is called *partial synonymy*. For example, the Tamil word ‘*uyarnta*’ has two meanings.



Here, the first meaning is synonymous with the word *neTiya* ‘*tall*’. For example,

e.g.

imayam mika *uyarnta* malai. ‘The Everest is the *highest* mountain.’
 Imayam mika *neTiya* malai. ‘The Everest is the *tallest* mountain.’

But ‘*neTiya*’ is not synonymous with ‘*uyarnta*’ in the second meaning, i.e. ‘*great*’. Example:

e.g.

Kamarajar oru *uyarnta* manitar. ‘Kamarajar is a *great* man’.
 Kaamarajar oru *neTiya* manitar. ‘Kamarajar is a *tall* man’,
 but not *‘Kamarajar is a great man’

But ‘*uyarnta*’ is synonymous with ‘*periya*’ in the meaning of ‘*great*’.

e.g.

Kamarajar oru *periya* manitar. ‘Kamarajar is a *great* man.’

Total synonymy:

It is based on the substitutability criterion. If two or more words are interchangeable in all the contexts in which they can occur, it is called *total synonymy*.

e.g.

In English:
almost and *nearly*

In Tamil:

collu and *kuuRu* ‘tell’

Antonymy:

Antonymy [Grkanti- ‘against,’ *ónyma* (= *ónoma*) ‘name’] is the sense relation that exists between words which are opposite in meaning, i.e. the relation of semantic opposition, for example, in English *antonym* is the antonym of *synonym*, *long-short*, *good-bad*, *coward-hero*, *dead-alive*, *big-small*, etc. Edward Finnegan defines antonymy as “a binary relationship between terms with complementary meanings” (Language: Its Structure and Use, 2012).

Types of antonyms:

Antonymy or oppositeness has an important role in structuring the vocabulary of English. This is special in the adjective word class. Here, many words occur in pairs and these pairs are known as anonymous pairs like *wide-narrow*, *deep-shallow*, *new-old*, *rough-smooth*, *light-dark*, *fast-slow*, *tidy-*

ugly, straight-crooked, night-day, etc. Though antonymy is typically found among adjectives, it is not restricted to this word class only. Instead, it may be the pair of verbs (*arrive-depart/bring-take*), nouns (*death-life/ courage-cowardice*), adverbs (*noisily-quietly/ carefully-carelessly*), prepositions (*above-below/in-out*), conjunctions (after-before), etc. Even though it is said like this, Steven Jones et al. point out that it's more accurate to say that 'antonym relations are more central to the adjective classes than to other classes' (*Antonyms in English, 2012*). Unlike synonymy, antonymy covers a number of different types of oppositeness of meaning. John Lyons (1997) identifies three types of antonyms: gradable antonyms, contradictory or complementary antonyms, and converses or relational antonyms.

Gradable antonyms:

Something which is not *big* is not necessarily *small*, it may be somewhere between the two sizes. Hence, *big* and *small* are called *gradable antonyms* or a *gradable pair*. Gradable antonyms are typically pairs of adjectives that can be qualified or modified by intensifying adverbs such as *very, quite, extremely*, etc. Thus, for example, we can say that The tickets were *expensive* or The tickets were *cheap*. However, as **expensive** and **cheap** are gradable antonyms, we can also qualify how *expensive* or *cheap* they were:

- The tickets were **surprisingly** expensive.
- The tickets were **very** expensive.
- The tickets were **quite** expensive.
- The tickets were **incredibly** cheap.
- The tickets were **rather** cheap.
- The tickets were **undeniably** cheap.

Some other examples of gradable antonyms are:

- My arm is *longer/shorter* than yours.
- I love a good book more than a good meal.

Here, these pairs are called gradable antonyms because they do not represent an either or relation but rather a *more-less relation*. The more-less relation is evident in the above examples.

Complementary antonyms:

Complimentary antonyms or contradictory (contraries) or ungradable antonyms or binary antonyms are word pairs that have no degree of meaning. There are only two opposite possibilities. For instance, a person who is not dead must be alive. Here, dead and alive are called *complementaries* or *ungradable antonyms*. Some other examples are *true-false, male-female, daughter-son, on-off, rich-poor, married-single, asleep-awake*, etc.

Converses or relational antonyms:

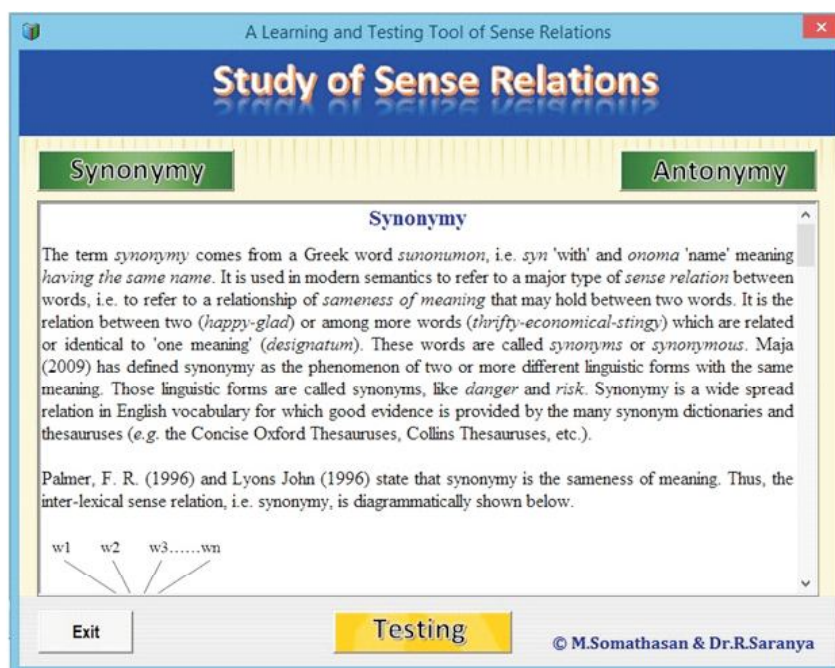
Relational antonyms are pairs that have a relationship. Each word wouldn't exist without the other. Converses or relational antonyms are pairs of words that refer to a relationship from opposite points of view, such as *parent-child, husband-wife, hello-goodbye, borrow-lend*, etc. The relationship between such words is called a converse relation. Converses can be understood as a pair of words where one word implies a relationship between two objects, while the other implies the existence of the same relationship when the objects are reversed, i.e. as said above, each word wouldn't exist

without the other. Some other examples include *open-close, front-back, in-out, buy-sell*, etc.

Methodology:

In Sri Lanka and India, English is taught in schools and universities as a second language and especially in most of the universities as the medium of instruction, too. As far as a post graduate student of English is concerned, it is essential to impart him the knowledge of English with linguistic background as he is involved in the line of research which is mostly empirical. When the sense relations are thought of, especially synonymy and antonymy, students' existing knowledge has to be tested or checked whether they have the sound knowledge in these two areas. Based on this concept, the first and second year students, at CAS in linguistics at Annamalai University were taken for this study and they were given the task sheets comprising of the questions in synonymy, antonymy, types of synonymy, and types of antonymy. Only 42 % of the students were successful in their answers and others were noted poor in their attempts. This shows that the 58% of the students need the knowledge in the sense relations synonymy and antonymy to proceed their course of education successfully. And further, it is felt that providing the knowledge in these sense relations through the computer based technology will be timely apt and it is the current learning trend, as well. Thus, having considered all these things in mind, a simple user-friendly computational tool is developed for learning and testing the sense relations, especially synonymy and antonymy. The tool will be helpful to improve the knowledge in the said areas. What is more, the programming language, vb6, is successfully used to design this tool.

Sample visual of the developed tool



Conclusion:

Sense relations or semantic relations reflect how meanings of one expression relate to the meanings of other expressions. These relations result in synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, homonymy, hyponymy, etc. Leech (1981) says that synonymy means 'word of the same meaning', such as *movie-film*. Synonymy consists of absolute synonymy, near synonymy, partial synonymy, and total synonymy. The sense relation, *antonymy*, means 'the word of opposite meaning'. Such as *happy-sad*. Antonymy

has three types. They are gradable antonyms which are restricted to gradable expressions correlating with opposite meaning (e.g. *good-bad*), complementary antonyms which refer to an either-or relationship between the two terms of a pair of semantic opposites like *dead-alive*, and converses (relational opposites) which describe the same situation from different perspectives such as *doctor-patient*. By studying these sense relations, a post graduate student of English will gain a lot of knowledge required to complete his part of the course, and especially when he goes through the developed learning and teaching tool, i.e. A learning and teaching tool of sense relations of words, he empirically studies about it through the relevant examples. Thus, there is no doubt that the tool will be a fully educational-based, an interesting one, and stimulate the students' English knowledge with linguistic background to great extent.

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