

THE CONTEXTUAL SEMANTIC REALIZATION OF THE LEXICAL UNITS “HESITATE, WAVER, VACILLATE, AND FALTER” AND “HESITATION, HESITANCY”

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Abstract. This article is dedicated to the research of synonymous groups for the designation of doubt “Hesitate, Waver, Vacillate, Falter” and “Hesitation, Hesitancy” in contemporary English-language fictional discourse. Doubt is defined as an epistemic state in the cognitive world of individuals which provides motivation to undertake a further quest for information. The purpose of this work is to investigate how the set of semes identified in each component of the synonymous group is presented in the context of modern English fictional discourse. This research is directed towards verifying whether the use of all the components of the given synonymous groups is of equal importance in modern language discourse, as well as checking whether all the semes of “Hesitate, Waver, Vacillate, Falter” and “Hesitation, Hesitancy” are used correctly, based on the results of the componential analysis. The results of the research make it possible to form conclusions regarding the homogeneity or heterogeneity of contextual semantic representations in discourse, dependent upon the number of constituents which make up the synonymous group.

Keywords: *doubt, epistemic state, fictional discourse, synonymous group, seme, contextual realization.*

Гнатюк Алла. Аналіз контекстуальної семантичної реалізації лексем “Hesitate, Waver, Vacillate, Falter” та “Hesitation, Hesitancy”.

Анотація. Стаття присвячена дослідженню синонімічних рядів на позначення сумніву “Hesitate, Waver, Vacillate, Falter” та “Hesitation, Hesitancy” у сучасному художньому англomовному дискурсі. Сумнів дефініціюється як епістемічний стан, що має місце у когнітивному світі людини та є рушійною силою до пошуку нової інформації. Дослідження має на меті виявити, яким чином набір сем, виділений у складі кожного компонента синонімічного ряду, представлений у контексті сучасного художнього англomовного дискурсу. Науковий пошук спрямовано для розпізнавання тенденції представлення компонентів синонімічного ряду у сучасному дискурсі, переважання чи відсутності деяких його складників, а також із метою з’ясування подібностей та відмінностей між набором сем, виявлених у результаті компонентного аналізу та фактичним набором, представленим у дискурсі. Отримані результати допомагають зробити висновок про гомогенність чи гетерогенність представлення семного набору у дискурсі.

Ключові слова: *сумнів, епістемічний стан, художній дискурс, синонімічний ряд, сема, контекстуальна реалізація.*

1. Introduction

The main cognitive category that makes entropic unawareness different from epistemic doubt is the notion of cognitive position. Cognitive position presupposes the presence of some basic knowledge which gives ground for epistemic state of doubt in the communicant’s mind when contradicting information is coming. We identify doubt as an epistemic state which is not a mental operation but belongs to the epistemic events in the individual’s cognitive world, develops and occurs over a certain amount of time and serves as the impulse and motive for further search for information (Evans, 2006), (Orthony, 1988).

Doubt is widely expressed in communication in everyday life and this process is thoroughly depicted in English-language fictional discourse. This epistemic state is reflected in the nomenclature employed both with verbal and non-verbal means. Thus, the successful decoding of doubt in discourse requires the application of interdisciplinary knowledge in the sphere of linguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics and even psychopathology (Dijk 1992), (Thagard, 2008), (Plutchik, 1980), (Crystal, 1997).

In our research, having chosen doubt as its *object*, we shall analyze one of the numerous lexico-semantic groups of synonyms by which it can be designated: “Hesitate, Waver, Vacillate, Falter” and “Hesitation, Hesitancy”. The *goal* of the article is to investigate how the sets of semes identified in each component of the synonymous groups are presented in the context of the contemporary English-language fictional discourse; to check whether their use is equally important in modern language discourse, and to verify whether all the semes are correctly used according to the results of the componential analysis.

2. Methods

For this purpose we have utilized the following methods:

- analysis of dictionary articles and definitions on the basis of *Webster’s Dictionary of Synonyms. First Edition. A Dictionary of Discriminated Synonyms with Antonyms and Analogous and Contrasted Words* (Merriam-Webster 1947);
- componential analysis;
- oppositional analysis;
- contextual analysis.

1. Results and Discussion

Having applied all the methods described above, we have obtained certain results, shown in the tables (Table 1, Table 2), which we shall describe more extensively in the Discussion section.

Table 1

The Results of Componential Analysis

Semes Lexical unit	irresolution	uncertainty	sign	before-the-decision action	after-the decision action	duration	weakness	retreat	shifting opinions	trembling	fear	nervousness	Total number of semes
Hesitate	+	+	+	+	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	4
Waver	+	+	–	–	+	–	+	+	–	–	–	–	5
Vacillate	+	+	–	+	–	+	–	–	+	–	–	–	5
Falter	+	+	+	–	+	–	–	–	–	+	+	+	7

Table 2

The Results of the Analysis of Contextual Realization

Lexical unit	Total number of semes	Number of semes identified in the discourse	Percentage of semes identified in the discourse
Hesitation	4	4	100
Hesitancy	3	3	100
Hesitate	4	(see Hesitation)	
Waver	5	5	100
Vacillate	5	5	100
Falter	7	6	86

We shall begin our research with an analysis of the lexico-semantic representation of doubt in the context of fictional discourse with the lexical unit “**Waver**”:

(1) “What about your relationship with Chief Tsosi? Will it change your objectivity?”

“Which question is more important to you?”

“Frankly?”

“Of course, frankly. I heard this is where you shine, Todd. Tell me.” ...

“Will your relationship with the chief change your objectivity?”

“Hasn’t so far. And the Chief wouldn’t allow that anyway. He’d push me out if I wavered from that.”

“What about the Chief’s objectivity?”

Is this guy listening to me?

“He has never **wavered** in his objectivity, ever. It is one of the chief’s best points: his duty to the objective. He instills a loyalty to that in all of us who work with him. I wish you would take a minute to talk to him, review his background.”

“I understand you have become engaged.” (Madrid-Null, 2006:225–226)

In the scale of the flow of discourse the lexical structure of polysemantic words is twice used to its full extent thanks to the presence of all the semes included in it. We have identified the following five semantic components of the lexeme under investigation: “*irresolution*”, “*uncertainty*”, “*before-the decision action*”, *weakness*, “*reatreat*” (see Table 1, Table2).

It is worthwhile drawing attention to the tendency which has been discovered in the usage of lexeme “**Vacillate**”. We have not come across any cases of its utilization for designating doubt in dialogues. On the other hand, the verb which has been mentioned is sometimes used for describing non-verbal signals. This statement is also true in connection with contemporary English-language fictional discourse.

However, we observe the application of this polysemantic unit in scientific literature, though it is not the main focus of our investigation. As the usage of “**Vacillate**” was not found in contemporary English-language fictional discourse and

we lack such examples, we consider it is important to illustrate the occurrence of this verb in contemporary scientific literature.

For instance, some essential discrepancies were observed when we compared the semantic composition of the verb “**Vacillate**” in the flow of fictional discourse dating back to the nineteenth century and the composition of this lexical unit in a scientific abstract from the twentieth century. The semantic composition of “**Vacillate**” in the piece of scientific work precisely reflected its modern paradigm, happening to be a combination of all the semes intrinsic to this verb. A surprising and seemingly contradictory result was demonstrated when we investigated the semantic realization of “**Vacillate**” in literary works of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. We shall first illustrate the phenomena which were described with the help of the example, which is the abstract from English-language scientific literature:

(2) *“Secure professions such as doctor, lawyer, judge, professor, minister, and perhaps scientist share the characteristic of having already accomplished the major hurdle of professional identity – a stable synthesis of the ordinary antithetical ideas implicit in the concepts of calling and job. A stable synthesis of these ordinarily conflicting ideas is no easy accomplishment. Consequently, it usually takes many centuries before aspirant professions become secure. During the period of professional purgatory, occupations and their incumbents normally **vacillate** between the ideas implicit in the concepts of calling and job instead of synthesizing them. Marginal professions, like any marginal entity, are uncertain of their place. They exhibit their uncertainty by **vacillating**. Furthermore, they **vacillate** between exaggerated or overdrawn versions of both calling and job.”* (Matza, 1964:144)

The lexical structure of “**Vacillate**”, identified in the quotation above, appears to comprise a full set of possible lexemes (100 %). Thus, we have managed to single out the following semantic components: “*irresolution*”, “*uncertainty*”, “*before-the-decision-action*”, “*duration*”, “*shifting opinions*”.

The realization of the semantic composition of “**Vacillate**” in the framework of the fictional discourse in literature dating back to the nineteenth century manifests several differences. Together with the characteristic semes such as “*irresolution*”, “*uncertainty*”, “*duration*”, “*shifting opinions*” (80 %), its paradigm includes the component “*after-the-decision action*”, which is an antonym to the previously identified seme “*before-the decision action*” and totally contradicts it.

(3) *“I hear,” he said, “that he is somewhat inclined to **vacillate**. That, after making up his mind to do a thing, and even after initiative steps are taken, he is apt to pause, look back, and reconsider. This, of course, will not suit us. The best way to manage him will be to get his money in our boat, and then we are sure of him. He is very wealthy, and can be of great use in the prosecution of our schemes.* (Arthur, 2008 : 144)

In the discourse environment above, the seme “*after-the-decision action*” is totally vivid, and is also supported by the sentences: *somewhat inclined to **vacillate**. That, after making up his mind to do a thing, and even after initiative steps are taken, he is apt to pause, look back, and reconsider.* This semantic composition is more peculiar to the lexical units “**Waver**” and “**Falter**”, with which “**Vacillate**” stands in

contrastive opposition. We consider that the contradictions that have been discovered are interesting lexico-semantic phenomena which deserve to be further investigated in samples of fictional discourse connected with different time frameworks.

The usage of the lexeme “**Falter**” by communicants is first and foremost caused by the need to nominate nonverbal signals for expressing doubt. Customarily, this lexeme is used in the contemplations of protagonists or their behavior descriptions provided by the author. The discourse sequence presented next is an example of the rare occasion of “**Falter**” being utilized in direct speech:

(4) *“As you may know, there is a warrant for my arrest as a confederate,” (he said) “They flatter me. I am flattered because I know whereof I speak when I speak of the fainthearted, the hands that faltered.” He held out his hand, then studied it himself as if it were a book.*

*“Here is one hand that **faltered**. Black as it is, it **faltered**. Brown asked for my help, but I thought his scheme would fail. Our town Tubman knew him better. She knew the man, she knew the times and most of all she knew the people. Now the two of 51 them have my unconditional support, this hand is theirs, and if that be treason, if loyalty to my own dark, enslaved, suffering, and benighted people be treason to the U.S.A., so be it.” (Bisson, 2009: 52)*

The lexical paradigm of the lexeme “**Falter**” is almost fully represented in the discourse flow. It is only the absence of one seme “*trembling*” among the meanings of the polysemant that prevents the contextual realization from reaching 100 %. The discourse context enabled us to identify the semantic components “*irresolution*”, “*uncertainty*”, “*sign*”, “*after-the-decision-action*”, “*fear*”, “*nervousness*”, which compose 86 % of the general lexical meaning of the verb under investigation (see Table 1, Table 2).

According to the theory of semantic ties between lexemes with common stems there is a lexical similarity among the concepts “**Hesitate**”, “**Hesitation**” and “**Hesitancy**”. Therefore, for this research we can use the results of semantic realization analysis on the basis of the synonymous group “**Hesitation, Hesitancy**”, which has the smallest number of components. It is represented by only two units, which are also cognate words and share the same root. We shall illustrate the functioning of “**Hesitation**” in the fictional discourse.

(5) *“What do you think of their organization?”*

*She seemed to give the question some thought before answering, and her **hesitation** made me sit up and take note.*

“Overall,” she said finally, “I think they’re fine. Good people at the top. Well organized.”

*“Do I sense a little **hesitation**?” I asked.*

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“Let’s just say I think the bigger clients are probably much more satisfied with CNA than the smaller ones.” (Clark, 2011:182)

The polysemantic word “**hesitation**” is used twice in the abstract that has been cited. As during the analysis of the discourse material preference is given to the lexical units which are exploited in the direct speech, we shall focus our attention on

the investigation of the usage of “*hesitation*” in the discourse environment “Do I sense a little *hesitation*?”

According to the results of componential analysis four semes are identified in the structure of “**Hesitation**” (“*Hesitating (showing irresolution or uncertainty)*”, “*act*”, “*fact*”, “*sign*”). The flow of discourse fully demonstrates the semantic composition of this lexeme (100 %) (see Table 1, Table 2).

The discourse material for demonstrating the application of the polysemantic word “**Hesitancy**” confirms the chronological orientation of nouns in literary works of the past centuries. “**Hesitancy**” displayed a highly archaic nature and appeared in our research only in the literary works of a scientific-historical or religious subject matter. The use of the mentioned lexical units was analyzed on the basis of the expression of doubt by the communicants in their remarks, namely in direct speech. For this reason we do not aim to qualify these lexical units archaically used in discourse as language archaisms, but intend rather to treat the peculiarities of their usage, as observed in the framework of discourse flow, as evidence of tendencies which in our opinion may also be to some extent characteristic of the live communication of English native speakers.

In order to confirm the peculiarities of the use of “**Hesitancy**” use in literature, we have prepared an illustration which is an episode in the historical memoirs of Alfred Ely and dates back to the late nineteenth century:

(6) “*October 12. – Mr. Huson no better; the physicians do not speak very confidently this morning about him. I am sure that his case is growing more doubtful, and I will endeavor to obtain permission to visit him in the course of the day. The commissary, who has always spoken so confidently as well as feelingly about his recovery, has a **hesitancy** of expression in regard to him this evening, which confirms my suspicions that he cannot get well, unless an immediate change for the better takes place.*” (Ely, 1862:161–162)

The semantic paradigm of the lexical unit “**Hesitancy**” is clearly presented in the abstract above. All three components of this polysemantic word are used in the context, providing full semantic realization of the noun “**Hesitancy**” (100 %). The following three semes were identified: “*hesitating (showing irresolution or uncertainty)*”, “*feeling*”, “*mood*” (see Table 1, Table 2).

The contextual realization of both lexical units from the synonymous group “**Hesitation, Hesitancy**” turned out to be the same. The semantic paradigm for “**Hesitancy**”, as well as for “**Hesitation**” was applied to its maximum degree in the fictional discourse (see Table 2). The homogeneity of this phenomenon may be partially explained by the low quantitative index of the synonymous group, as it comprises only two units. This result in turn presupposes that the heterogeneity of the semantic contextual realization of polysemantic words in synonymous groups would be enhanced if its components were more numerous.

As we have already provided an analysis of the semantic realization of “**Hesitation**” and “**Hesitancy**” in the discourse flow framework, we consider these results relevant for the description of the semantic utilization patterns for the verb

“**Hesitate**”, and therefore shall not provide additional illustrations of discourse for the lexical unit “**Hesitate**”.

2. Conclusions

The low heterogeneity of contextual semantic realization of lexical units which was observed in the synonymous group is demonstrated by the following percentage indices: “**Hesitate**” (on the basis of “**Hesitation**”) – 100 %, “**Waver**” – 100 %, “**Vacillate**” – 100 %, “**Falter**” – 86 %. The results of the contextual analysis are presented in table 1. These results may provide a basis for further analogous research into the semantic contextual realization of other synonymous groups for the designation of doubt in discourse.

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