On polysemy in English and Ukrainian

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До питання полісемії в англійській та українській мовах

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Language is at the heart of our understanding of cultural identity. It is "conceived as a functional inheritance of a civilization's history" [1, p. 36], a socially-embedded practice. People accomplish many things with language. They communicate through it, endowing culture with meaning. Regardless of their common roots, languages differ primarily in how their elements are expressed. The lexicon appears to be "one area of language where differences are readily apparent" [7, p. 73–74]. Words are used to make references to the ambient world we live in and therefore are capable of carrying out specific cultural "footprints". Consequently, the world is understood by accessing semantic information encapsulated in concepts [1, p. 39; 5, p. 80].

The focus of contemporary typological research has recently shifted to the structural properties of languages. In this regard, a comparison of English and Ukrainian lexical stocks denoting *good* may yield some insights into the structural properties of the

lexical systems of the two languages. Polysemy seems to be an objective criterion for comparison since it relates to "the stable linguistic knowledge encoded by lexical concepts prior to language use" [2, p. 155]. Furthermore, it helps explain the diachronic evolution of word meaning [8, p. 116] and "contrasts with vagueness, where a single word encompasses a broad range of referents not because it has multiple senses, but because it has one very general sense" [4, p. 174].

The study aims to define the role of polysemy in structuring and organizing the lexical stocks denoting *good* in modern English and Ukrainian.

Polysemantic words within the lexico-semantic group "Good" in English and Ukrainian do not occur in a random order but are hierarchically organized. Their meanings are shaped due to extralinguistic factors. The former are derivable from their position in a relational network. The matrix method best reveals semantic correlations between the words denoting *good* in English and Ukrainian. In the matrix, the former are fixed through lines and columns, where the vertical axe shows the lexical stock and the horizontal one – the seme stock. The sign (+) denotes the relation between the lexical units and their meanings in the studied languages. The words and their meanings in the matrix are grouped in the descending order due to their quantitative expression – from the most polysemantic to monosemantic ones.

Lexico-semantic groups "Good" in English and Ukrainian are divided into the words with high (84 nouns in English and 14 – in Ukrainian), middle (110 nouns in English and 24 – in Ukrainian), low degrees of polysemy (217 nouns in English and 128 – in Ukrainian) and monosemantic ones (6 nouns in English and 51 – in Ukrainian). Concerning quantitative characteristics, the groups of nouns with the low degree of polysemy are the most numerous in both languages, making up 51,3% of the lexical stock under study in English and 58,9% – in Ukrainian.

Comparing the polysemantic words denoting *good* in English and Ukrainian, we can assume that the meanings of the related words do not align perfectly in the compared languages. For instance, the English word *good* possesses 17 meanings. The compilers of the Oxford English Dictionary define it as follows: *whatever is good in itself or beneficial in effect*; *the good portion, side, or aspect (of anything)*; *the well-*

being, profit, or benefit (of a person, community, or thing; the resulting advantage, benefit, or profit of anything); *a good quality, virtue, grace; a good action*; *something, whether material or immaterial, which it is an advantage to attain or possess*; *a desirable end or object*; *property or possessions*; *movable property*; *sealable commodities, merchandise, wares* [6]. However, its counterpart *добро* in Ukrainian has 7 meanings: everything positive in human life, satisfying people's interests, desires, and dreams (*усе позитивне в житті людей, що відповідає їх інтересам, бажанням, мріям*); good (*благо; протилежне лихо, зло*); an act of goodwill (*добра, корисна справа, вчинок і т. ін.*); the satisfaction one feels in certain circumstances (*про задоволення, яке хто-небудь відчуває від певного становища, певних обставин і т. ін.*); one's belongings (*сукупність належних кому-небудь речей, предметів, цінностей і т. ін.; майно*); something bad, of poor quality (*ірон. про щось погане, недоброякісне, незначне і т. ін.* [9, Т. 2, с. 323]. Furthermore, the lexical units in question establish multiple formal system relations which extend their semantic depth. For example, the noun *добро* has a semantic relation with the words *милість*, *ласка*, *послуга*, *подвиг* and *благодіяння*, denoting a kind or good action.

The results of this study show that polysemy is a linguistic universal with language-specific lexicalization patterns in each of the languages. From this viewpoint, there is no precise semantic identity between the polysemantic words denoting *good* in English and Ukrainian. Polysemy ensures both the economy of language means and an objective criterion for system and structural parametrization of the studied lexis. The studied words present potential semantic overloads due to their representational depth and the complex network of relations they enter into.

The prospects for further study concern a comprehensive lexico-semantic analysis of the nouns denoting *good* in English, Ukrainian and French.

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