

## SEMANTIC PECULIARITIES OF THE NOUNS WITH THE MIDDLE DEGREE OF POLYSEMY DENOTING *GOOD* IN ENGLISH

### СЕМАНТИЧНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ІМЕННИКІВ НА ПОЗНАЧЕННЯ *ДОБРА* З СЕРЕДНІМ СТУПЕНЕМ ПОЛІСЕМІЇ В АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ МОВІ

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The proposed paper deals with the in-depth lexico-semantic study of the nouns with the middle degree of polysemy denoting *good* in modern English. *Good* as a member of binary opposition is a concept fixing the results of human practical activity and value orientations prevalent in the English social community. The study has been conducted with the help of formalized analysis of lexical semantics. The latter integrates structural-mathematical and purely linguistic methods. Its application made it possible to reveal the semantics of the nouns denoting *good* and their correlations with other units in the studied lexicon, singling out their quantitative and qualitative characteristics.

The research findings have shown that every word under study possesses a definite internal structure, presenting a hierarchy of correlated lexical meanings. The nouns with the middle degree of polysemy denoting *good* in English occupy definite positions within the analyzed lexical stock. The lexical meaning of each word is determined by its relations with other lexical units. Thus, the words under study possess common and distinctive meanings that reflect both universal and culture-specific concepts. Summarizing the study's findings, it is evident that language is to be considered regarding communicative, social, and psychological constraints. The words under analysis denote moral and cultural values, social norms and living conditions, human relations, personal qualities and attitudes towards others, religious and spiritual notions. The semantics of the lexical units denoting *good* in modern English proves the inevitable connection with the properties, entities, relations, and situations in the ambient world. Furthermore, paradigmatic relations between the words represent metalinguistic knowledge and play a key role in human comprehension and reasoning.

**Key words:** polysemy, formalized analysis, lexical semantics, lexical meaning, semantic relations.

Стаття присвячена комплексному лексико-семантичному дослідженню іменників на позначення *добра* з середнім ступенем полісемії у сучасній англійській мові. Будучи членом бінарної опозиції, *добро* виступає концептом здатним фіксувати результати людської діяльності та цінності, які превалюють в англійській спільноті. Дослідження проведене за допомогою методики формалізованого аналізу лексичної семантики, яка ґрунтується на поєднанні структурно-математичних та власне лінгвістичних методів. Запропонований підхід дозволяє розкрити семантику іменників на позначення *добра* в англійській мові, виявити співвідношення між словами та їхніми лексичними значеннями. На основі методики формалізованого аналізу лексичної семантики виявлено їхні кількісні та якісні характеристики.

Проведене дослідження дало змогу стверджувати, що іменники на позначення *добра* мають чітко організовану семантичну структуру, представляючи ієрархію пов'язаних лексичних значень. Досліджувані слова із середнім ступенем полісемії займають визначені місця серед аналізованого лексичного складу. Лексичне значення кожного слова визначається його семантичними зв'язками з іншими одиницями. Отже, іменники на позначення *добра* в англійській мові містять спільні і відмінні значення, які відображають універсальні та культурно-специфічні поняття. Лексико-семантичний аналіз досліджуваних слів показав, що останні позначають моральні та культурні цінності, соціальні норми, умови життя, людські відносини, духовні поняття, риси характеру та ставлення до інших. Семантичні відношення між лексичними одиницями на позначення *добра* свідчать про зв'язки між предметами та явищами в реальному світі. Парадигматичні зв'язки між словами відображають металінгвістичні знання і відіграють ключову роль у людському мисленні та сприйнятті навколишнього світу.

**Ключові слова:** полісемія, формалізований аналіз, лексична семантика, лексичне значення, семантичні зв'язки.

**Introduction.** Over the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the studies concerned with the link between language, culture, and cognition. Language is “a way in which mankind’s life exists and the home in which mankind finds himself dwelling” [15, p. 66]. It is regarded as a uniquely human ability to communicate experience and transmit culturally

relevant cognition. The latter is possible due to “linking things or ideas through signs (words, sounds) to culturally established reference points of shared meanings” [11, p. 187]. Thus, language is, on the most part, shaped by cultural regulations and values.

Undoubtedly, certain concepts of universal character appear to be lexicalized in almost all

languages. However, languages demonstrate substantial differences in respect of the way the world is modelled. In his seminal work, D. Geeraerts highlights the importance of language for cultural identity. The scholar believes that “the categories that we use in the language are specific to the language, specific to the culture, specific to the region” [9, p. 7]. In the same vein, E. A. Di Paolo, E. C. Cuffari and H. De Jaegher maintain that language is “a living stream of activity in the sociomaterial world of practices and history” [5, p. 7]. Since language is intricately linked to the life of society, it is capable of storing culture-specific meanings.

Language is “a key element in transferring information, a specific mental entity that is prone to constant development” [13, p. 225]. In this respect, the lexical stock of the language can fix people’s views on themselves, their role in the world, and their attitudes towards others. Furthermore, word meanings in the lexicon present holistic entities constructing specific metalanguage and expressing thoughts about past contacts, history, current social events, and processes. Therefore, the repository of word meanings mutually related in speakers’ minds accounts for how the objects and phenomena are related in real life.

The present paper *aims* to engage in an in-depth analysis of the nouns’ semantic peculiarities with the middle degree of polysemy denoting *good* in modern English to gain a clearer understanding of the interrelations between them.

The following *objectives* have been set to achieve the aim: 1) to determine the specificity of *good*

reflection in the semantics of the nouns with the middle degree of polysemy in English; 2) to disclose the semantic relations between them.

**Material and methods.** The nouns denoting *good* have been chosen as our research material, represented by 411 lexical units possessing 1147 meanings. The language material presented herein was selected from the most reliable authoritative English language resource – the Oxford English Dictionary in 20 volumes [14]. The formalized analysis of lexical semantics has been used to comprehensively research words’ semantic peculiarities, further developed by M. P. Fabian [7]. It allows revealing the semantics of the lexical units in question by studying the correlations between the words and their meanings and singling out the peculiarities of their seme stock. The approach is based on formal, exclusively language criterion – the reference of the words to the noun class.

The model represents the semantic correlations between the nouns through columns and lines (Table 1). The horizontal axe indicates the seme stock and the vertical one – the lexical stock. The sign (+) shows the correlation between words and their meanings. The methodology of the comprehensive study lies in several successive steps. In the initial step, the words expressing *good* explicitly and implicitly are selected from the most authoritative explanatory dictionary of English [14]. Their qualitative and quantitative analyses are based on the obtained data. Since a matrix represents the semantic space of the words in question, the final step presupposes the comparison of the words within each group and the semes within each subset, describing their semantic features.

Table 1

**Matrix fragment of the English nouns denoting *good* (upper left part)**

Lexical stock \ Seme stock	In phrases	In plural	Action, deed, act, fact	Condition, state	Quality	Fields of sciences	Of a person	Human’s traits of character	Disposition, character	Sports, games and recreation	Instance, occasion, case	Advantage	Feeling, emotion (of)	Status, standing, rank,	Moral excellence, magnificence	Position	Personified	Benefit	Assistance, help, aid	Love, liking, fellow-feeling
service <sup>58</sup>	+	+	+	+		+	+	+		+	+	+						+	+	+
grace <sup>50</sup>	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+			+	+	+				
truth <sup>47</sup>	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+							+			
turn <sup>42</sup>	+	+	+	+		+				+	+									
regard <sup>42</sup>	+	+											+			+				

The matrix method of semantic correlations between the words is considered a metalanguage for the verbalization of *good*, and the very matrix represents the semantic structure of the analyzed lexis.

**Results and discussion.** Since English is regarded as a “self-sufficient” [17, p. 4] system, possessing a definite structure organized due to certain principles, the words denoting *good* constitute a system with established relations. The lexical stock under research in modern English includes 411 words possessing 1147 lexical meanings. The lexis in question is divided into four groups due to their degree of polysemy and semantic characteristics (Table 2).

It can be seen from the data in Table 2 that the groups of polysemantic nouns quantitatively exceed the group of monosemantic words, making up 98,5% of the whole lexical stock. Polysemy raises a host of challenging issues in semantic applications of the words denoting *good*, concerned with contextual modulation of their lexical meanings, the possibility of enantiosemy occurrence, and even words’ representation in the mental lexicon. It “contrasts with vagueness” [10, p. 174] and relates to “the stable linguistic knowledge encoded by lexical concepts prior to language use” [6, p. 155]. Furthermore, so far as “vocabulary, irrespective of its language, is in a constant state of flux” [12, p. 64], the role of polysemy in language study is exceptionally significant as it “helps explain many linguistic phenomena such as the diachronic evolution of the word meaning” [16, p. 116], that is accompanied by lexical narrowing or broadening. The conceptual approach to the nature of polysemy in our study is built on the research conducted by I. L. Falkum [8, p. 25], who claims that polysemy is a fundamentally communicative phenomenon, which arises as a result of encoded lexical concepts being massively underdetermining of speaker-intended concepts and is grounded in our pragmatic inferential ability.

The very issues raised above greatly influenced and conditioned the words’ choice with the middle degree of polysemy denoting *good* as the objects of our lexico-semantic research. The lexical units in question comprise 110 nouns (26,8 % of the whole lexical stock under research) characterized by 19-12 meanings.

The range of notions they depict varies from a person’s everyday life to his/her social activity and spiritual and moral convictions. This research will be focused on the nouns with 19–18 meanings.

The nouns *humanity*, *store*, *profit*, *sympathy*, *benefice*, *fairness*, *eminence*, and *accident* possess 19 meanings, having both common and distinctive semantic features. *Good* appears to be an aspect of human moral consciousness intimately bound with socially embedded practices. For this reason, the use of the words denoting *good* encourages engaging in the form of social action laden with cultural values [1, p. 12]. The lexical units under study stand for concepts with a complex internal structure and are involved in a well-developed semantic network, expressing the infinitude of meanings in the English language. These close semantic links are particularly visible in the intersection of the lexical meanings *a good behaviour*, *a good deed* and *good*, inherent in the words *humanity*, *benefice* and *profit*. The former two involve a reference to *kindness*, *grace*, and *politeness in their semantics*. The lexical units *benefice* and *profit* function in the English language system as synonyms, revealing the notions of *advantage* and *benefit*. The former, denoting *a beneficial property or action*, appears to be semantically close to the nouns *sympathy* (*the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others*) and *accident* (*any accidental or non-essential accompaniment, quality or property*).

The words in question invoke social values, virtues, and stereotypes widespread among speakers of English: *the quality of being humane* (*humanity*), *fair* (*fairness*), *affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other* (*sympathy*) and *an eminent quality* (*eminence*). The nouns *humanity* and *sympathy*, refer in their meanings to *a disposition to treat human beings and animals with consideration and compassion, relieving their distresses* and *to agree or approve*. Having semantic relations with the word *fairness*, the latter imply certain states or conditions characterizing the good-doer: *the condition of being fair* (*fairness*), *the condition of being human* (*humanity*), *the state of being affected by the suffering or sorrow of another*

Table 2

Lexical stock of the English nouns denoting *good*

Groups of words	In numbers	In percent
Words with the high degree of polysemy	84	20,4
Words with the middle degree of polysemy	110	26,8
Words with the low degree of polysemy	217	51,3
Monosemantic words	6	1,5
Total:	411	100

(*sympathy*). The lexemes *humanity* and *fairness* express similar semantics of *courtesy* and *men in the abstract*.

Regardless of their common meanings, some specific semantic differences between the words under research are identified. The concepts encapsulated in the nouns denoting *good* in English do reflect a kind attitude to others (*humanity*: *civility, obligingness; benevolence, humaneness; benefice*: *favour; "indulgence"*), moral and social values (*fairness*: *equitableness, fair dealing, honesty, impartiality, uprightness*), social activity and its evaluation (*profit*: *advance, improvement; eminence*: *distinguished superiority, elevated rank as compared with others; mastery, the 'upper hand'; acknowledgement of superiority, homage; an excellence; a distinction, honour; the 'flower'*), human traits of character (*fairness*: *gentleness*), human sensations, beliefs and desires (*sympathy*: *agreement, accord, harmony, consonance, concord; agreement in qualities, likeness, conformity, correspondence; conformity of feelings, inclinations, or temperament, which makes persons agreeable to each other; community of feeling; harmony of disposition; a feeling of compassion or commiseration; a favourable attitude of mind towards a cause, etc.*), good deeds (*benefice*: *favourable influence or operation; protection; a gift, gratuity*) and material values (*profit*: *interest; the gain, well-being; store*: *a person's collective possessions; accumulated goods or money; something precious, a treasure*).

The lexical unit *accident* holds a special place among the words under study, combining both neutrally (*an occurrence, incident, event; an unusual event, which proceeds from some unknown cause, or is an unusual effect of a known cause; chance, fortune*) and negatively marked notions (*a casualty, a contingency; an unfortunate event, a disaster, a mishap*). It is the very example of what Carston tried to prove by stating that "if a word's standing meaning can be adjusted/modified so that different meanings/senses are communicated on different occasions of use, there has to be an array of meaning components that can be played about with, highlighted, backgrounded, dropped, or otherwise rearranged" [3, p. 247]. In this regard, the meanings of the noun *accident* can be treated as the unity of both semantic and pragmatic components.

The lexical units *reputation, sport, cheer, concern, blessing, estimation, opportunity, preference, chivalry, benefit, exploit, contingency, dainty, felicity* and *weal* form the group of words characterized by 18 meanings. The words *reputation, estimation, opportunity, preference, chivalry, benefit* and *exploit* reveal the semantics of action or

fact; however, each of them broadens the universal notion of *good*, depicting the national specificity of the English nation. When used concerning *the condition of being highly regarded or esteemed*, the words *reputation* and *estimation* retain their socially-bound character. Closely related to the lexemes in question are the nouns *opportunity, contingency* and *felicity*, which characterize *the condition of things favourable to an end or purpose, or admitting of something being done or effected (opportunity), condition of things contingent or dependent upon an uncertain event; the condition of being liable to happen or not in the future; the condition of being free from predetermining necessity regarding existence or action; condition of being subject to chance, or of being at the mercy of accidents (contingency), the state of being happy (felicity)*. In the light of these definitions, it seems clear that words "reach their full meanings through considerable pragmatic inference relying on encyclopaedic information or on immediate and extended contexts" [2, p. 146].

The nouns *reputation* and *estimation* are associated with *the opinion or view of one about something*. The former establishes semantic relations with the word *chivalry*, designating *distinction, fame and glory*. The shared concept of *honour* is encoded in the lexical meanings of the words *reputation* and *dainty*. The evaluative stance embodied in the nouns *reputation, estimation, preference* and *dainty* unites them into a synonymic row, yet each lexical unit reveals additional evaluative aspects. As D. Chandler states, "whithin a language, many words may refer to 'the same thing' but reflect different evaluations of it" [4, p. 74]. For example, *dainty* denotes *estimation, esteem, reputation* – *the common or general estimate of a person with respect to character or other qualities, estimation* – *esteem considered as a sentiment, preference* – *estimation of one thing before or above another*. A set of these synonyms represent a concept of estimation and it can, in turn, be explained using synonymous members. However, the denotational range of the word *dainty* covers the ranges of *reputation, estimation* and *preference*.

The definitions of the lexemes denoting *good* recognize an anthropocentric dimension in *good*, realized through human traits of character, which play a core role in human self-determination, behaviour and attitude to others. Thus, the nouns *chivalry* and *cheer* posit the sense of *the brave, honourable, and courteous character attributed to the ideal knight and disposition, especially as showing itself by external demeanour*. Along with words *dainty* and *felicity* the former convey multiple meanings concerned with character traits activating social norms and



stereotypes: *cheerfulness* (**cheer**), *chivalrousness* (**chivalry**), *daintiness* (**dainty**) and *a fortunate trait (in an individual)* (**felicity**). In other words, *good* in the English vocabulary system forms a value world picture, activating specific evaluations, human qualities and objects of the ambient world, personal revelations following morally-ethical, aesthetical and social norms accepted in English society.

So far as the words denoting *good* stand for concepts with a complex internal structure, *good* may be analyzed as an extralinguistic category. As a result, they can form certain semantic microsystems based on the similarity of the notions in the real world expressed by their lexical meanings. In the daily life of the English, the lexical units *reputation* and *weal* are used to refer to *good report*. Semantically related to them is the noun *benefit*, expressing *good* explicitly. The close link between the words *benefit* and *exploit* can be illustrated by their common lexical meaning *advantage*. The latter establishes semantic relations with the word *estimation*, designating *worth in the opinion of others*, and *felicity*, expressing *success*. The nouns *blessing* and *felicity* are glossed as *blessing, benediction*. The semantics of the lexical units *blessing, preference, benefit* and *dainty* encompasses the concept of *favour*. The lexico-semantic analysis of the nouns denoting *good* has shown that *good* is a concept ranging over personal as well as social experiences. It evokes associative pictures connected with *credit, note (reputation), pleasant pastime (sport), entertainment (sport), amorous dalliance or intercourse (sport), kindly welcome or reception (cheer), a financial or commercial interest or share, an estate (concern), invocation and bestowal of divine favour by any*

*one (blessing), appreciation, valuation in respect of excellence or merit (estimation), precedence, superiority, preferment, promotion (preference)*.

The word *contingency* extrapolates different evaluative explications, ranging from positive (*fortuitousness*) and neutral (*the befalling or occurrence of anything without preordination; an event the occurrence of which could not have been, or was not, foreseen; an event conceived or contemplated as of possible occurrence in the future*) to negative aspects (*an accident, a casualty*) of its semantics. The evaluative aspects correlated in the noun's semantic structure are characterized by relativity and selectivity, as they are related to normativity and the category of time.

**Conclusions.** One of the most significant findings from this study is that the nouns denoting *good* in English are characterized by regular polysemy, which fosters establishing paradigmatic relations between them. Certain semantic microsystems are constructed due to the similarity of their meanings. The peculiarities mentioned above prove the words' mobile and system character within the English language. The comprehensive lexico-semantic analysis of the words with the middle degree of polysemy denoting *good* in English has shown that the semantic structure of every single unit within the relational network presents a strictly organized system of interconnected lexical meanings. The analyzed words prove the anthropocentric and socio-pragmatic nature of *good* in modern English.

The prospects for further study concern a more comprehensive lexico-semantic analysis of the nouns denoting *good* as members of binary opposition "good-evil" in distantly related and non-related languages.

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