

METHODS FOR STUDYING VERBS OF STATE

Tuyliyeva Lola Abdullayevna,

Senior Lecturer, Department of Russian Linguistics,

Bukhara State University

E-mail: tuylieva70@mail.ru

Abstract

This article examines methods and techniques for studying the semantics of verbs of state in Modern Russian. It demonstrates that the semantics of verbs of state can be investigated by means of componential analysis, describes the lexico-semantic classification of the verbs under study, and identifies the integral and differential features of the semantic structure of verbs sharing the general meaning 'state'.

Keywords: Semantics, lexical unit, lexical meaning of a word, state, lexico-semantic group, verbs of state, componential analysis, sememe, archiseme, integral seme, differential seme.

Introduction

Language is a complex sign system that has taken shape over the course of social history. It manifests itself and functions through speech. Speech, in turn, is realized through linguistic resources (material). These resources consist primarily of words (lexemes), which possess both form and content, that is, sound and meaning. It is in these two fundamental aspects that the word acquires its socio-practical and scientific value.

The semantic structure of a word is directly linked to its meaning (sememe). There is no meaning without a semantic structure, and each meaning is assessed in terms of its semantic structure. Meaning constitutes the content side of a particular word and, as a unified whole together with its material basis, the sound envelope, performs a specific function in language and speech. More precisely, meaning, as a phenomenon of linguistic consciousness, has an extralinguistic basis. The objects, properties and relations of reality that underlie every word with an independent meaning are reflected in the linguistic name, that is, in the linguistic unit (the word) and in the meaning of the word.

The meaning of a word, i.e. its semantic (sense) structure, consists of certain logical parts, or components (semes). By forming the meaning of a word, these logical constituents show that each meaning is a distinct linguistic unit. The components of word meaning convey a particular message in speech. Consequently, the minimal logical constituents of word meaning stand in stable relations of mutual integrity and serve as the verbal expression of meaning.

Studying and analysing the semantic composition (structure) of a word, namely identifying the logical parts of its meaning, determining its smallest components (semes), establishing the place and significance of each seme within the meaning (sememe), revealing its relation to other semes and finding the logical connection between meanings (forming a syntagm), makes it possible to determine the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of words, to arrange words into series, and to discover the regularities that distinguish words in paradigmatic relations from one another. The results of such research are of considerable theoretical and practical importance for semasiology, lexicography, lexicology and linguistics as a whole. Accordingly, it is essential to study the semantic structure of verbs, including verbs of state, as a separate object of inquiry.

In recent years, linguistics has devoted considerable attention to the semantics of the verb as the leading and most important part of speech. The semantic structure of verbs of state is of particular interest.

Unlike verbs of action (e.g. бежать ‘to run’, читать ‘to read’, звонить ‘to ring, to call’), verbs of state denote feelings, sensations, desires, mental processes or physical states of the speaker or of another entity rather than active physical actions as such. Verbs of this kind include ненавидеть ‘to hate’, знать ‘to know’, понимать ‘to understand’, etc. For example: Лиза очень **любила** её, открывала ей все свои тайны ‘Liza was very **fond** of her and confided all her secrets to her’ (A. S. Pushkin, The Squire’s Daughter). That is, Liza experiences a feeling of affection and fondness. She is not performing any action; this is something that takes place internally, in her mind or heart. By means of verbs of state we express attitudes, opinions, perceptions and the like.

To reveal the semantic structure of verbs of state and to determine their minimal semantic features, it is expedient to employ componential analysis. This method involves decomposing the meaning of a word into minimal semantic components, semes, whose interrelation forms its overall semantic structure [2, p. 64].

Componential analysis makes it possible to establish which semes make up a sememe, i.e. the meaning of a word. The seme is regarded as the minimal unit of content identified in the course of analysis. The degree to which a meaning is segmented depends on the objectives of a particular study.

Different semes play unequal roles in the meaning of a word: some form its basis, while others perform subordinate functions. Meaning is a structure, and the semes within it are ordered. In order to identify and interpret verbs of state, one must find in the meanings of these words both the semantic components (semes) common to all of them and the specific components inherent only in the meaning of a given word: the archiseme (general seme), integral (unifying) semes and differential (distinguishing) semes. These semes serve as semantic parameters in studying the content of a meaning (sememe). They interpret and evaluate the meanings of the words to which they belong, both in language and in speech.

Thus, the general, integral and differential semes in the meaning of a word are not merely a quantitative sum constituting the meaning (sememe); rather, by forming a distinctive system and structure within the semantic structure of the word, they enable language (speech) to perform its communicative-interventional function.

The central positions in the hierarchy of semes are occupied by semes common to large groups of meanings, namely categorial semes: школа 'school' – 'objecthood', красивый 'beautiful' – 'attributivity', писать 'to write' – 'action'. Consider the following group of verbs of speech: говорить 'to speak', разговаривать 'to talk, to converse', произносить 'to pronounce, to utter', мямлить 'to mumble', тараторить 'to rattle on', ворчать 'to grumble', etc. The categorial seme of these words is 'action', while the general seme that unites these verbs into a group, the archiseme, is 'to perform speech' = 'to use oral speech'.

The archiseme is a seme common to and characteristic of all units of a certain class; it unites these units into a class and distinguishes this class from others. It is the nuclear and principal seme in the structure of lexical meaning. This seme serves as the name of a semantic field, the largest paradigm, which unites words whose meanings share one common semantic feature. For example, the semantic field with the archiseme 'to perform speech' includes the following verbs: говорить, произносить, разговаривать, ворчать, тараторить, мямлить, etc.

The categorial and nuclear semes govern more specific semes, namely integral and differential ones. Differential semes are the semantic components (semes) by

which the meanings of words differ from one another. In other words, differential semes distinguish, or differentiate, word meanings [3, p. 131].

Consider the following group of verbs: спать ‘to sleep’, вечереть ‘to grow dusk’, любить ‘to love’, грустить ‘to be sad’, краснеть ‘to turn red, to blush’, ненавидеть ‘to hate’, жалеть ‘to pity’, находиться ‘to be located’, etc. These verbs are united into a single group by the presence in their meanings of the common categorial-lexical seme ‘manifestation of a state’. The archiseme of these words is ‘state’. This is a numerous class of verbs with its own specific features.

Just as objects belonging to the same logical class have both common and particular features, verbs sharing the common feature ‘state’ also possess distinctive semantic features, i.e. differential semes. Owing to their differential semes, these verbs have a clear logical expression that sets them apart, to a certain extent, from the general meaning: спать ‘to be in a state of sleep’; вечереть ‘to draw towards evening’; любить ‘to feel attachment’; грустить ‘to feel sadness’; краснеть ‘to become red’; ненавидеть ‘to feel aversion’; жалеть ‘to feel compassion’; находиться ‘to be situated somewhere’.

In addition to differential semes, verbs with the archiseme ‘state’ contain other semes, namely integral (unifying) ones. These have a definite meaning and occupy an intermediate position between the archiseme and the differential semes. Integral semes are relatively independent and broader in scope than differential semes. They contain general features characteristic of the meanings of words belonging to a particular lexico-semantic group. The integral seme is also originally part of the archiseme and is singled out as a result of analysis. Compared with the differential seme, both the archiseme and the integral seme are regarded as general semes. However, the range of the integral seme is narrower than that of the archiseme, since it is associated only with those components of word meanings that are characteristic of a certain small circle (sub-circle). The archiseme, by contrast, is the logical part of word meaning that is the broadest in scope and the richest in content, although it still has its boundaries. Each internal lexico-semantic subgroup of verbs with the archiseme ‘state’ has its own integral semes.

Thus, the integral seme, which is similar to the nuclear seme but is always identified after it, narrows to a certain extent the sphere of influence of the

archiseme, forms particular lexico-semantic groups and delimits small stable wholes.

The study of the meanings of Russian verbs of state in terms of their semantic components has established that the semantic field with the archiseme 'state' comprises several lexico-semantic groups. A lexico-semantic group is a group of words belonging to the same part of speech and "united by one categorial-lexical seme, that is, a set of words combined primarily on the basis of the components of their basic meaning" [1, p. 102]. Different sources classify the verbs under consideration in different ways: some divide them into four groups, while others distinguish six types. Below we consider a classification comprising five groups:

- 1) Verbs of psychological (emotional) state, which denote a psychological state.
- 2) Verbs of physical state. This class includes lexical units denoting perception and abstract sensations obtained through the organs of touch and smell.
- 3) Verbs of biological state.
- 4) Verbs that characterize a state figuratively.
- 5) Verbs of relation.

In these lexico-semantic groups, the archiseme is 'state', whereas the semantic components 'psychological', 'physiological', 'biological', 'figurative', 'prolonged continuous', 'result of an action', 'performance', 'motion' and 'qualification' are integral semes.

The distinction between integral and differential semes is relative. A differential seme of a broader semantic group may function as an integral seme within a narrower semantic group. Differential features distinguish word meanings within a paradigm. The limit to which a meaning is divided into semes is determined by the objectives set in the study [4, p. 23].

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