**LECTURE 1**

### 1 The object of lexicology, links with other branches of linguistics.

### 2. Two approaches to language study

### 3. Types of lexicology

### 4. The course of modern English lexicology

**5. The theoretical and practical value of English lexicology**

**1 The object of lexicology, links with other branches of linguistics.**

Lexicology (from Gr *lexis* ‘word’ and *logos* ‘learning’) is the part of linguistics dealing with the vocabulary of the language and the properties of words as the main units of language.

**The term vocabulary is used to denote the system formed by the sum total of all the words and word equivalents that the language possesses.**

The term **word**denotes the basic unit of a given language resulting from the association of a particular meaning with a particular group of sounds capable of a particular grammatical employment. The word therefore is simultaneously a semantic, grammatical and phonological unit.

The general study of words and vocabulary, irrespective of the specific features of any particular language, is known as **general lexicology**. Linguistic phenomena and properties common to all languages are generally referred to as languageuniversals.**Speciallexicology**devotes its attention to the description of the characteristic peculiarities in the vocabulary of a given language. Special lexicology may be **historical** and **descriptive.**

It goes without saying that every special lexicology is based on the principles of general lexicology, and the latter forms a part of general linguistics.

A great deal has been written in recent years to provide a theoretical basis on which the vocabularies of different languages can be compared and described. This relatively new branch of study is called **contrastive lexicology**. Most obviously, we shall be particularly concerned with comparing English and Russian words.

The evolution of any vocabulary, as well as of its single elements, forms the object of **historicallexicologyor etymology**. This branch of linguistics discusses the origin of various words, their change and development, and investigates the linguistic and extra-linguistic forces modifying their structure, meaning and usage. In the past historical treatment was always combined with the comparative method. Historical lexicology has been criticised for its atomistic approach, i.e. for treating every word as an individual and isolated unit. This drawback is, however, not intrinsic to the science itself. Historical study of words is not necessarily atomistic. In the light of recent investigations it becomes clear that there is no reason why historical lexicology cannot survey the evolution of a vocabulary as an adaptive system, showing its change and development in the course of time.

**Descriptive lexicology** deals with the vocabulary of a given language at a given stage of its development. It studies the functions of words and their specific structure as a characteristic inherent in the system. The descriptive lexicology of the English language deals with the English word in its morphological and semantical structures, investigating the interdependence between these two aspects. These structures are identified and distinguished by contrasting the nature and arrangement of their elements.

**\*\*\*\*\*\*The connection of lexicology with phonetics, stylistics, grammar and other branches of linguistics**

The importance of the connection between **lexicology and phonetics** stands explained if we remember that a word is an association of a given group of sounds with a given meaning, so that **top** is one word, and **tip** is another. Phonemes have no meaning of their own but they serve to distinguish between meanings. Their function is building up morphemes, and it is on the level of morphemes that the form-meaning unity is introduced into language. We may say therefore that phonemes participate in signification.

Word-unity is conditioned by a number of phonological features. Phonemes follow each other in a fixed sequence so that [pit] is different from [tip]. The importance of the phonemic make-up may be revealed by the substitution test, which isolates the central phoneme of hope by setting it against hop, hoop, heap or hip.

An accidental or jocular transposition of the initial sounds of two or more words, the so-called spoonerisms illustrate the same point. Cf. our queer old dean for our dear old queen, sin twister for twin sister, May I sew you to a sheet? for May I show you to a seat?, a half-warmed fish for a half-formed wish, etc.1

Discrimination between the words may be based upon stress: the word ‘import is recognised as a noun and distinguished from the verb im'port due to the position of stress. Stress also distinguishes compounds from otherwise homonymous word-groups: ‘blackbird : ‘black ‘bird. Each language also possesses certain phonological features marking word-limits.

Historical phonetics and historical phonology can be of great use in the diachronic study of synonyms, homonyms and polysemy. When sound changes loosen the ties between members of the same word-family, this is an important factor in facilitating semantic changes.

The words whole, heal, hail, for instance, are etymologically related. 2 The word whole originally meant ‘unharmed’; unwounded’. The early verb whole meant 4to make whole’, hence ‘heal’. Its sense of ‘healthy’ led to its use as a salutation, as in hail! Having in the course of historical development lost their phonetic similarity, these words cannot now exercise any restrictive influence upon one another’s semantic development. Thus, hail occurs now in the meaning of ‘call’, even with the purpose to stop and arrest (used by sentinels).

Meaning in its turn is indispensable to phonemic analysis because to establish the phonemic difference between [ou] and [o] it is sufficient to know that [houp] means something different from [hop].

All these considerations are not meant to be in any way exhaustive, they can only give a general idea of the possible interdependence of the two branches of linguistics.

Stylistics, although from a different angle, studies many problems treated in lexicology. These are the problems of meaning, connotations, synonymy, functional differentiation of vocabulary according to the sphere of communication and some other issues. For a reader without some awareness of the connotations and history of words, the images hidden in their root and their stylistic properties, a substantial part of the meaning of a literary text, whether prosaic or poetic, may be lost.

Thus, for instance, the mood of despair in O. Wilde’s poem “Taedium Vitae” (Weariness of Life) is felt due to an accumulation of epithets expressed by words with negative, derogatory connotations, such as: desperate, paltry, gaudy, base, lackeyed, slanderous, lowliest, meanest.

An awareness of all the characteristic features of words is not only rewarded because one can feel the effect of hidden connotations and imagery, but because without it one cannot grasp the whole essence of the message the poem has to convey. The difference and interconnection between grammar and lexicology is one of the important controversial issues in linguistics and as it is basic to the problems under discussion in this book, it is necessary to dwell upon it a little more than has been done for phonetics and stylistics.

A close connection between lexicology and grammar is conditioned by the manifold and inseverable ties between the objects of their study. Even isolated words as presented in a dictionary bear a definite relation to the grammatical system of the language because they belong to some part of speech and conform to some lexico-grammatical characteristics of the word class to which they belong. Words seldom occur in isolation. They are arranged in certain patterns conveying the relations between the things for which they stand, therefore alongside with their lexical meaning they possess some grammatical meaning. Сf. head of the committee and to head a committee.

The two kinds of meaning are often interdependent. That is to say, certain grammatical functions and meanings are possible only for the words whose lexical meaning makes them fit for these functions, and, on the other hand, some lexical meanings in some words occur only in definite grammatical functions and forms and in definite grammatical patterns.

For example, the functions of a link verb with a predicative expressed by an adjective cannot be fulfilled by every intransitive verb but are often taken up by verbs of motion: come true, fall ill, go wrong, turn red, run dry and other similar combinations all render the meaning of ‘become sth’. The function is of long standing in English and can be illustrated by a line from A. Pope who, protesting against blank verse, wrote: It is not poetry, but prose run mad.1

On the other hand the grammatical form and function of the word affect its lexical meaning. A well-known example is the same verb go when in the continuous tenses, followed by to and an infinitive (except go and come), it serves to express an action in the near and immediate future, or an intention of future action: You're not going to sit there saying nothing all the evening, both of you, are you? (Simpson)

Participle II of the same verb following the link verb be denotes absence: The house is gone.

In subordinate clauses after as the verb go implies comparison with the average: ... how a novel that has now had a fairly long life, as novels go, has come to be written (Maugham). The subject of the verb go in this construction is as a rule an inanimate noun.

The adjective hard followed by the infinitive of any verb means ‘difficult’: One of the hardest things to remember is that a man’s merit in one sphere is no guarantee of his merit in another.

Lexical meanings in the above cases are said to be grammatically conditioned, and their indicating context is called syntactic or mixed. The point has attracted the attention of many authors.

The number of words in each language being very great, any lexical meaning has a much lower probability of occurrence than grammatical meanings and therefore carries the greatest amount of information in any discourse determining what the sentence is about.

W. Chafe, whose influence in the present-day semantic syntax is quite considerable, points out the many constraints which limit the co-occurrence of words. He considers the verb as of paramount importance in sentence semantic structure, and argues that it is the verb that dictates the presence and character of the noun as its subject or object. Thus, the verbs frighten, amuse and awaken can have only animate nouns as their objects.

The constraint is even narrower if we take the verbs say, talk or think for which only animate human subjects are possible. It is obvious that not all animate nouns are human.

This view is, however, if not mistaken, at least one-sided, because the opposite is also true: it may happen that the same verb changes its meaning, when used with personal (human) names and with names of objects. Compare: The new girl gave him a strange smile (she smiled at him) and The new teeth gave him a strange smile.

These are by no means the only relations of vocabulary and grammar. We shall not attempt to enumerate all the possible problems. Let us turn now to another point of interest, namely the survival of two grammatically equivalent forms of the same word when they help to distinguish between its lexical meanings. Some nouns, for instance, have two separate plurals, one keeping the etymological plural form, and the other with the usual English ending -s. For example, the form brothers is used to express the family relationship, whereas the old form brethren survives in ecclesiastical usage or serves to indicate the members of some club or society; the scientific plural of index, is usually indices, in more general senses the plural is indexes. The plural of genius meaning a person of exceptional intellect is geniuses, genius in the sense of evil or good spirit has the plural form genii.

It may also happen that a form that originally expressed grammatical meaning, for example, the plural of nouns, becomes a basis for a new grammatically conditioned lexical meaning. In this new meaning it is isolated from the paradigm, so that a new word comes into being. Arms, the plural of the noun arm, for instance, has come to mean ‘weapon’. E.g. to take arms against a sea of troubles (Shakespeare). The grammatical form is lexicalised; the new word shows itself capable of further development, a new grammatically conditioned meaning appears, namely, with the verb in the singular arms metonymically denotes the military profession. The abstract noun authority becomes a collective in the term authorities and denotes ‘a group of persons having the right to control and govern’. Compare also colours, customs, looks, manners, pictures, works which are the best known examples of this isolation, or, as it is also called, lexicalisation of a grammatical form. In all these words the suffix -s signals a new word with a new meaning.

It is also worthy of note that grammar and vocabulary make use of the same technique, i.e. the formal distinctive features of some derivational oppositions between different words are the same as those of oppositions contrasting different grammatical forms (in affixation, juxtaposition of stems and sound interchange). Compare, for example, the oppositions occurring in the lexical system, such as work :: worker, power :: will-power, food :: feed with grammatical oppositions: work (Inf.) :: worked (Past Ind.), pour (Inf.) :: will pour (Put. Ind.), feed (Inf.) :: fed (Past Ind.). Not only are the methods and patterns similar, but the very morphemes are often homonymous. For example, alongside the derivational suffixes -en, one of which occurs in adjectives (wooden), and the other in verbs (strengthen), there are two functional suffixes, one for Participle II (written), the other for the archaic plural form (oxen).

Furthermore, one and the same word may in some of its meanings function as a notional word, while in others it may be a form word, i.e. it may serve to indicate the relationships and functions of other words. Compare, for instance, the notional and the auxiliary do in the following: What you do’s nothing to do with me, it doesn’t interest me.

Last but not least all grammatical meanings have a lexical counterpart that expresses the same concept. The concept of futurity may be lexically expressed in the words future, tomorrow, by and by, time to come, hereafter or grammatically in the verbal forms shall come and will come. Also plurality may be described by plural forms of various words: houses, boys, books or lexically by the words: crowd, party, company, group, set, etc.

The ties between lexicology and grammar are particularly strong in the sphere of word-formation which before lexicology became a separate branch of linguistics had even been considered as part of grammar. The characteristic features of English word-building, the morphological structure of the English word are dependent upon the peculiarity of the English grammatical system. The analytical character of the language is largely responsible for the wide spread of conversion and for the remarkable flexibility of the vocabulary manifest in the ease with which many nonce-words are formed on the spur of the moment.

This brief account of the interdependence between the two important parts of linguistics must suffice for the present. In future we shall have to return to the problem and treat some parts of it more extensively.

**2. TWO APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE STUDY**

The distinction between the two basically different ways in which language may be viewed, the historical or **diachronic**(Gr *dia*‘through’ and *chronos* ‘time’) and the descriptive or **synchronic** (Gr *syn*‘together’, ‘with’), is a methodological distinction, a difference of approach, artificially separating for the purpose of study what in real language is inseparable, because actually every linguistic structure and system exists in a state of constant development. The distinction between a synchronic and a diachronic approach is due to the Swiss philologist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913).Indebted as we are to him for this important dichotomy, we cannot accept either his axiom that synchronic linguistics is concerned with systems and diachronic linguistics with single units or the rigorous separation between the two. Subsequent investigations have shown the possibility and the necessity of introducing the historical point of view into systematic studies of languages.

Language is the reality of thought, and thought develops together with the development of society, therefore language and its vocabulary must be studied in the light of social history. Every new phenomenon in human society and in human activity in general, which is of any importance for communication, finds a reflection in vocabulary. A word, through its meaning rendering some notion, is a generalised reflection of reality; it is therefore impossible to understand its development if one is ignorant of the changes in social, political or everyday life, production or science, manners or culture it serves to reflect. These extra-linguistic forces influencing the development of words are considered in historical lexicology. The point may be illustrated by the following example:

*Post* comes into English through French and Italian from Latin. Low Latin *posta — posita*fern. p.p. of Latin *ponere, posit,* v. ‘place’. In the beginning of the 16th century it meant ‘one of a number of men stationed with horses along roads at intervals, their duty being to ride forward with the King’s “packet” or other letters, from stage to stage’. This meaning is now obsolete, because this type of communication is obsolete. The word, however, has become international and denotes the present-day system of carrying and delivering letters and parcels. Its synonym *mail,* mostly used in America, is an ellipsis from *a mail of letters,* i.e. ‘a bag of letters’. It comes from Old French *male* (modern *malle)* ‘bag’, a word of Germanic origin. Thus, the etymological meaning of *mail* is ‘a bag or a packet of letters or dispatches for conveyance by post’. Another synonym of *bag* is *sack* which shows a different meaning development. Sack is a large bag of coarse cloth, the verb *to sack* ‘dismiss from service’ comes from the expression *to get the sack,* which probably rose from the habit of craftsmen of old times, who on getting a job took their own tools to the works; when they left or were dismissed they were given a sack to carry away the tools.

The branch of linguistics, dealing with causal relations between the way the language works and develops, on the one hand, and the facts of social life, on the other, is termed sociolinguistics. Some scholars use this term in a narrower sense, and maintain that it is the analysis of speech behaviour in small social groups that is the focal point of sociolinguistic analysis. A. D. Schweitzer has proved that such microsociological approach alone cannot give a complete picture of the sociology of language. It should be combined with the study of such macrosociological factors as the effect of mass media, the system of education, language planning, etc. An analysis of the social stratification of languages takes into account the stratification of society as a whole.

Although the important distinction between a diachronic and a synchronic, a linguistic and an extralinguistic approach must always be borne in mind, yet it is of paramount importance for the student to take into consideration that in language reality all the aspects are interdependent and cannot be understood one without the other. Every linguistic investigation must strike a reasonable balance between them.

The lexicology of present-day English, therefore, although having aims of its own, different from those of its historical counterpart, cannot be divorced from the latter. In what follows not only the present status of the English vocabulary is discussed: the description would have been sadly incomplete if we did not pay attention to the historical aspect of the problem — the ways and tendencies of vocabulary development.

Being aware of the difference between the synchronic approach involving also social and place variations, and diachronic approach we shall not tear them asunder, and, although concentrating mainly on the present state of the English vocabulary, we shall also have to consider its development. Much yet remains to be done in elucidating the complex problems and principles of this process before we can present a complete and accurate picture of the English vocabulary as a system, with specific peculiarities of its own, constantly developing and conditioned by the history of the English people and the structure of the language.

**3. THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL VALUE OF ENGLISH LEXICOLOGY**

The importance of English lexicology is based not on the size of its vocabulary, however big it is, but on the fact that at present it is the world’s most widely used language. One of the most fundamental works on the English language of the present — “A Grammar of Contemporary English” by R. Quirk, S. Greenbaum, G. Leech and J. Svartvik (1978) — gives the following data: it is spoken as a native language by nearly three hundred million people in Britain, the United States, Ireland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and some other countries. The knowledge of English is widely spread geographically — it is in fact used in all continents. It is also spoken in many countries as a second language and used in official and business activities there. This is the case in India, Pakistan and many other former British colonies. English is also one of the working languages of the United Nations and the universal language of international aviation. More than a half world’s scientific literature is published in English and 60% of the world’s radio broadcasts are in English. For all these reasons it is widely studied all over the world as a foreign language.

The theoretical value of lexicology becomes obvious if we realise that it forms the study of one of the three main aspects of language, i.e. its vocabulary, the other two being its grammar and sound system. The theory of meaning was originally developed within the limits of philosophical science. The relationship between the name and the thing named has in the course of history constituted one of the key questions in gnostic theories and therefore in the struggle of materialistic and idealistic trends. The idealistic point of view assumes that the earlier forms of words disclose their real correct meaning, and that originally language was created by some superior reason so that later changes of any kind are looked upon as distortions and corruption.

The materialistic approach considers the origin, development and current use of words as depending upon the needs of social communication. The dialectics of its growth is determined by its interaction with the development of human practice and mind. In the light of V. I. Lenin’s theory of reflection we know that the meanings of words reflect objective reality. Words serve as names for things, actions, qualities, etc. and by their modification become better adapted to the needs of the speakers. This proves the fallacy of one of the characteristic trends in modern idealistic linguistics, the so-called Sapir-Whorf thesis according to which the linguistic system of one’s native language not only expresses one’s thoughts but also determines them. This view is incorrect, because our mind reflects the surrounding world not only through language but also directly.

Lexicology came into being to meet the demands of many different branches of applied linguistics, namely of lexicography, standardisation of terminology, information retrieval, literary criticism and especially of foreign language teaching.

Its importance in training a would-be teacher of languages is of a quite special character and cannot be overestimated as it helps to stimulate a systematic approach to the facts of vocabulary and an organised comparison of the foreign and native language. It is particularly useful in building up the learner’s vocabulary by an effective selection, grouping and analysis of new words. New words are better remembered if they are given not at random but organised in thematic groups, word-families, synonymic series, etc.

A good knowledge of the system of word-formation furnishes a tool helping the student to guess and retain in his memory the meaning of new words on the basis of their motivation and by comparing and contrasting them with the previously learned elements and patterns.

The knowledge, for instance, of the meaning of negative, reversative and pejorative prefixes and patterns of derivation may be helpful in understanding new words. For example such words as *immovable* a, *deforestation* n and *miscalculate* v will be readily understood as ‘that cannot be moved’, ‘clearing land from forests’ and ‘to calculate wrongly’.

By drawing his pupils’ attention to the combining characteristics of words the teacher will prevent many mistakes. It will be word-groups falling into patterns, instead of lists of unrelated items that will be presented in the classroom.

A working knowledge and understanding of functional styles and stylistic synonyms is indispensable when literary texts are used as a basis for acquiring oral skills, for analytical reading, discussing fiction and translation. Lexicology not only gives a systematic description of the present make-up of the vocabulary, but also helps students to master the literary standards of word usage. The correct use of words is an important counterpart of expressive and effective speech.

An exact knowledge of the vocabulary system is also necessary in connection with technical teaching means.

Lexicology plays a prominent part in the general linguistic training of every philologist by summing up the knowledge acquired during all his years at the foreign language faculty. It also imparts the necessary skills of using different kinds of dictionaries and reference books, and prepares for future independent work on increasing and improving one’s vocabulary.

Modern English Lexicology aims at giving a systematic description of the word-stock of Modern English. Words, their component parts — morphemes — and various types of word-groups are subjected to structural and semantic analysis primarily from the synchronic angle. Thus, Modern English Lexicology investigates the problems of word-structure and word-formation in Modern English, the semantic structure of English words, the main principles underlying the classification of vocabulary units into various groupings, the laws governing the replenishment of the vocabulary with new vocabulary units.

Modern English Lexicology studies the relations between various layers of the English vocabulary and the specific laws and regulations that govern its development at the present time. The source and growth of the English vocabulary, the changes it has undergone in its history me also dwelt upon. A section dealing with Lexicography, the science and art of dictionary compiling, is also traditionally included in a course of Lexicology.

This course treats the following basic problems:

1. Semasiology;

2. Word-Structure;

3. Word-Formation;

4 Etymology of the English Word-Stock;

5. Word-Groups and Phraseological Units;

6. Variants and Dialects of the English Language;

7. English Lexicography.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What Greek morphemes is the term 'lexicology' composed of?2. What does lexicology study? 3. What does the term 'word' denote? 4 What is the term 'vocabulary' used to denote? 5. What is the object of study of General Lexicology? 6. What does Special Lexicology study? *7.* What forms the object of study of Historical Lexicology? 8. What does Descriptive Lexicology deal with? 9. What branches of linguistics does lexicology have close ties with? 10. What are the principal approaches in linguistic science to the study of language material? 11What is the difference between them? 12 What does Modern lexicology aim at? 13What problems does Modern Lexicology investigate? 14 Why is it important to study English Lexicology?