DEFINITIONS OF LEXICAL UNITS IN MODERN LINGUISTICS

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Abstract

This paper explores the varied definitions of lexical units within modern linguistic theory, highlighting how different frameworks conceptualize the basic meaning-bearing components of language. Lexical units are generally understood as minimal elements that carry semantic content, but their interpretation varies across linguistic approaches. Structural linguistics views lexical units as elements defined by their position within a systemic network of contrasts. Generative linguistics treats them as entries in the mental lexicon, emphasizing formal features and syntactic behavior. Cognitive linguistics interprets lexical units as symbolic pairings of form and meaning grounded in conceptual structures and human cognition. Corpus-based linguistics, in contrast, identifies lexical units through patterns observed in large collections of authentic language data. Together, these perspectives illustrate the multidimensional nature of lexical units and demonstrate how meaning, cognition, structure, and usage all contribute to their definition. This study underscores the importance of integrating multiple approaches for a comprehensive understanding of the lexicon.

Key words

Lexical unit, lexeme, lexicon, lemma, meaning, structural linguistics, Generative linguistics, cognitive linguistics, corpus – based linguistics

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola zamonaviy tilshunoslik nazariyalarida leksik birliklarning turli ta'riflarini o'rganadi va turli yondashuvlar tilning ma'no tashuvchi asosiy komponentlarini qanday tushuntirishini ko'rsatadi. Leksik birliklar odatda semantik mazmunni tashuvchi minimal elementlar sifatida tushuniladi, ammo ularning talqini tilshunoslik yondashuvlariga qarab farq qiladi. Strukturaviy tilshunoslik leksik birliklarni til tizimidagi kontrastlar tarmog'idagi o'rni bilan aniqlangan elementlar sifatida ko'radi. Generativ tilshunoslik esa ularni ruhiy leksikonda joylashgan yozuvlar sifatida ko'rib, formal xususiyatlar va sintaktik xatti-harakatlarga e'tibor qaratadi. Kognitiv tilshunoslik leksik birliklarni shakl va

ma'noning ramziy juftliklari sifatida, insonning tushunchaviy tuzilmalari va kognitiv jarayonlariga asoslangan holda talqin qiladi. Korpus asosidagi tilshunoslik esa leksik birliklarni katta hajmdagi haqiqiy til ma'lumotlaridagi naqshlar orqali aniqlaydi. Ushbu yondashuvlar birgalikda leksik birliklarning ko'p o'lchovli tabiati va ularning ta'rifida ma'no, kognitsiya, tuzilma va ishlatishning ahamiyatini namoyish etadi. Tadqiqot bir nechta yondashuvlarni integratsiyalash tilshunos lug'atni to'liq tushunish uchun muhimligini ta'kidlaydi.

Kalit so`zlar

leksik birlik, leksema, lug`at, lug`at shakli, ma`no, strukturaviy tilshunoslik,generative tilshunoslik, kognitiv tilshunoslik, korpus asosidagi tilshunoslik

The notion of the lexical unit has a rich historical and conceptual background rooted in linguistics and lexicology. Historically, lexical units evolved from early philosophical investigations into the meaning of words, progressing through various phases including the pre-scientific period and the Middle Ages, where terms like "terminus" - Latin for boundary or limit began to shape linguistic concepts. The development of lexical units involves understanding words not simply as isolated items but as components vested with semantic, morphological, and syntactic properties that collectively contribute to a language's lexicon organization. The main linguistic element of forming the linguistic image of the world in foreign language classes is the lexicon, which is a form of objectification of the linguistic consciousness of the speakers of the language. In this regard, the formation of needs, interests and goals in language learners determines the need to positively influence the effectiveness of learning lexical material.[60] The lexicon plays a central role in shaping the linguistic image of the world for learners in foreign language classes, as it reflects the cultural and cognitive worldview of native speakers. Therefore, understanding and mastering lexical units is essential for developing meaningful linguistic competence. When learners' needs, interests, and goals are aligned with the learning process, the acquisition of lexical material becomes more effective, motivating students and enhancing the overall quality of language learning.

Lexical units constitute the fundamental semantic elements of a language, serving as the primary vehicles for meaning representation and communication. They function as the basic building blocks of linguistic expression, enabling the construction of sentences and the coherent transmission of information. Beyond

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[60] Hurshid Sarimsokov, Madina Ravshanova, Malohat Badalbaeva, Nargiza Sultanova. Lexical units: approaches as words, terms and neologisms. — The Bioscan, 2024. —41p, 45.

their structural role, lexical units encode the cognitive and cultural framework of a speech community, reflecting how speakers perceive, categorize, and conceptualize the external world. In modern linguistics, the study of lexical units is central to semantic, morphological, and syntactic analysis, providing insights into the organization of the mental lexicon and language processing. Furthermore, in the context of foreign language acquisition, mastery of lexical units is critical for vocabulary development, communicative competence, and pragmatic accuracy. Consequently, lexical units are indispensable both for theoretical linguistic research and for practical applications in language learning and pedagogy. The minimal unit of semantics is not the word but rather the lexeme, linguistic item, or linguistic unit. The lexeme is the name of the abstract unit which links all the morphological variants of a word. Thus, we can say that go, goes, went, have gone, and to go all are instantiations of the lexeme to go.[61] A lexeme unifies all word forms under a single meaning, serving as the fundamental unit of lexical analysis.

In modern linguistics, a lexical unit is broadly defined as a minimal unit of language that carries meaning. Different terms are used to describe various aspects of these units, reflecting both semantic and practical perspectives. Lexical unit as a basic unit in the lexicon that carries meaning and can be a simple word, part of a word, or a multi-word expression.[62] A lexical unit is the fundamental meaning-bearing element of a language, whether it appears as a single word, a meaningful part of a word, or a fixed multi-word expression. It represents the core building block of the lexicon.

A lemma is the canonical or dictionary form of a lexeme. It serves as a reference point in dictionaries and lexical databases. Using the same example, run is the lemma representing the entire lexeme. A lemma is the dictionary entry form of a lexeme, typically the base form for verbs and the singular form for nouns.[63] A lemma is the canonical form of a lexeme used in dictionaries and lexical resources to represent all its variations. It acts as the principal reference for a word, usually appearing as the base form for verbs and the singular form for nouns, allowing speakers and learners to identify and organize related word forms efficiently. A lexical item, in contrast, refers to any single word or multi-word expression that functions as a coherent meaning-bearing entity in actual language use. This can include simple words like dog, phrasal verbs like give up, or idiomatic expressions such as kick the bucket. Lexical item or "lexical entity" has multiple senses,

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[61] Imola Katalin Nagy. An Introduction to Lexical Semantics for Students of Translation Studies. — Cluj-Napoca: Scientia Publishing House, 2017. —30p, 206.

[62] Lyons, John. Language and Linguistics: An Introduction. — Cambridge : Cambridge University Press,1981. —58p, 370.

[63] Bauer, Laurie. Introducing linguistic morphology. — Edinburgh: Georgetown University Press, 2003. —325p, 384.

depending on what the "lexicon" is taken to comprise.[64] Haspelmath distinguishes multiple senses of lexical items depending on the theoretical view of the lexicon: Word-forms: Concrete surface forms observed in language. Lexemes: Abstract units representing all inflected forms of a word. Inventorial items: irregular, idiosyncratic units stored in the lexicon. Mental items: Representations of words or expressions in a speaker's mental lexicon.

Thus, the study of lexical units in modern linguistics integrates these concepts: the lexeme as the core meaning-bearing unit, the lemma as its reference form, and the lexical item as the practical unit of language use. Together, these definitions provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing the structure, meaning, and function of words and expressions in human communication.

Modern linguistics studies language from different perspectives, each emphasizing distinct aspects. There are four types approaches: structural, generative, cognitive and corpus-based linguistics. Structural linguistics focuses on meaning as it exists within the language system, examining how words and lexical items relate to one another as part of a structured network of signs. The approach treats meaning as system-dependent, highlighting that words and expressions gain significance from their position and relation to other elements in the language. Language should be studied as a system of signs a "langue" rather than as a collection of independent words with separate histories. In this view, a linguistic sign is made up of two parts: a "signifier" sound-image and a "signified" concept, and what gives meaning to a sign is its relation to other signs in the system - not some inherent, referential link to external reality.[65] Structural linguistics, founded by Ferdinand de Saussure and developed further by Leonard Bloomfield, studies language as a system of interrelated elements. It emphasizes the relationships between signs, words, sounds, or symbols within the language system rather than focusing on individual items in isolation. Structural linguists analyze language through patterns, contrasts, and distributions, aiming to describe how the components of a language function together to create meaning.

Generative linguistics is a framework developed primarily by Noam Chomsky in the 1950s and 1960s. In this approach, the lexicon is not just a list of words but a structured mental repository where each lexical entry contains syntactic, morphological, and semantic information. The rules of the grammar interact with these lexical entries to produce well-formed sentences. Generative linguistics focuses on competence rather than performance, aiming to describe the underlying

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[64] Martin Haspelmath. Four kinds of lexical items: Words, lexemes, inventorial items, and mental item. — France: Lexique, 2024. —71-95p.

[65] Ferdinand de Saussure. Course in General Linguistics. — New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. —168p, 336.

principles that make all human languages possible.[66] Chomsky's work, such as Syntactic Structures, laid the foundation for studying sentence structure through transformational-generative grammar, which analyzes how surface sentences can be generated from deep structural rules.

Cognitive linguistics is a modern approach to language that views it as intimately connected to human cognition. Unlike formal or generative approaches that focus on abstract rules, cognitive linguistics emphasizes that meaning, conceptual structures, and mental representations are central to understanding language. The cognitive linguistic approach argues that language is governed not by a specialized, autonomous "language module," but by general cognitive principles shared with other kinds of cognition.[67] Cognitive linguistics views language as a fundamentally meaning-driven system rooted in general human cognition rather than in an autonomous linguistic module. It emphasizes that understanding language requires examining the mental representations, conceptual structures, and experiential knowledge that shape how people think and communicate.

The last approach is corpus-based. Corpus-based linguistics is an approach to language study that relies on large collections of real-life texts, known as corpora, to analyze how language is actually used. Instead of relying on intuition alone, corpus linguistics examines authentic spoken and written data to uncover patterns of grammar, vocabulary, meaning, and discourse.[68] Corpus-based linguistics offers an empirical, evidence-driven way of understanding language by analyzing large collections of authentic spoken and written texts. By relying on real usage rather than intuition, it reveals patterns of grammar, vocabulary, and meaning that might otherwise remain unnoticed. This approach highlights how language functions in everyday communication and provides a more accurate and objective foundation for linguistic description and analysis.

In modern linguistics, lexical units are understood as the fundamental meaning-bearing elements of language, encompassing everything from individual words to multi-word expressions and morphological components. While different linguistic frameworks define lexical units in distinct ways - structural linguistics focusing on their role within the language system, generative linguistics viewing them as entries in the mental lexicon, cognitive linguistics linking them to conceptual structures, and corpus linguistics identifying them through real-usage patterns - all perspectives agree that lexical units serve as the core building blocks

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[66] Noam Chomsky. Syntactic structures. — Netherlands: Mouton & Co, 1957, —98p, 116.
[67] William Croft, D. Alan Cruse. Cognitive Linguistics. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. —256p, 376.
[68] Tony McEnery, Andrew Hardie. Corpus Linguistics: Method, Theory and Practice. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. —287p, 312.

of meaning and communication. Together, these approaches provide a comprehensive understanding of how lexical units are represented, processed, and used in human language.

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