METALINGUISTIC MARKING IN SEMANTIC SPACES OF MODERN ENGLISH VOCABULARY

GANIYEVA AZIZA VAHOB QIZI

Annotation: The article addresses the problem of metalinguistic marking as an important phenomenon in semantic organization of the vocabulary of modern English. Special attention is paid to lexical labels and contextual markers that give information on usage, stylistic value, emotional connotation, historical development, or functional features of lexical units. Metalinguistic marking aids speakers in the identification of whether a word is formal, informal, archaic, dialectal, technical, colloquial, offensive, humorous or associated with a particular social group. The work examines the role of such markers in the formation and differentiation of semantic spaces of the English vocabulary. It also addresses the relationship between marked and unmarked lexical units and shows how metalinguistic information affects the interpretation and proper use of words in various communicative situations.

Keywords: Metalinguistic marking, semantic space, English vocabulary, lexical units, semantic field, stylistic marking, connotation, lexical semantics.

The vocabulary of a language is not merely a collection of isolated words. Lexical units are linked to each other by semantic, stylistic, functional, cultural and contextual relations. The vocabulary of Modern English is particularly rich and dynamic because it is constantly developing under the influence of social changes, technological progress, globalisation, cultural interaction, changes in communicative practices. Metalinguistic marking in this complex lexical system is of considerable importance. It indicates how, where and by whom a particular lexical unit may appropriately be used. Metalinguistic marking offers extra information about a word over and above its basic denotative meaning and helps speakers to understand its stylistic, social, emotional, historical and functional features. The concept of metalinguistic marking is closely connected with lexical semantics and lexicography. In dictionaries, words are frequently accompanied by labels such as formal, informal, archaic, dialectal, slang, technical, literary, offensive, humorous, or regional. These labels do not constitute the lexical meaning itself; rather, they provide information about the conditions and contexts in which a word is normally used. Consequently, metalinguistic marking can be regarded as an important mechanism for organizing the semantic space of vocabulary. Metalinguistic marking refers to additional linguistic information that characterizes a lexical item from the perspective of its usage. While the semantic meaning of a word explains what

the word refers to or what concept it expresses, a metalinguistic marker explains how the word functions within communication. For example, the English words child, kid, and offspring can refer to a young human being or a person's son or daughter, but they are not completely interchangeable. Child is relatively neutral, kid is commonly associated with informal communication, while offspring often has a more formal or biological character. Thus, stylistic and functional information contributes to the interpretation and appropriate selection of these lexical units.

Metalinguistic marking may therefore indicate several dimensions of lexical usage. These include stylistic level, emotional evaluation, social group, geographical distribution, historical period, professional sphere, and communicative purpose. Such information helps speakers distinguish between lexical units that may have similar denotative meanings but different pragmatic or stylistic values. The semantic space of a language can be modelled as a structured network of words connected by their meanings, associations, functions and contexts of use. Words belonging to the same semantic field may denote related notions, but they are different in their stylistic, emotive or social features. For example, the semantic space of the concept “money” includes words such as money, cash, income, salary, wealth, earnings, bucks and dough. These words are semantically related but used differently. Money is neutral, salary refers specifically to regular payment for employment, while bucks and dough are informal expressions. Therefore, the semantic organization of vocabulary cannot be adequately described only through denotative relationships. Metalinguistic information is also necessary to explain the differences between lexical items occupying neighboring positions within a semantic space. The semantic space can consequently be viewed as multidimensional. One dimension may represent conceptual meaning, another stylistic value, another emotional evaluation, and another social or geographical distribution. Metalinguistic marking gives information about these extra dimensions and adds to a fuller description of lexical structure.

Stylistic marking is one of the most frequent types of metalinguistic marking. It indicates whether a word belongs to formal, neutral, informal, literary, colloquial, etc. For example, commence is more formal than start and kids is less formal than children. Such differences are particularly important in academic, professional, and official communication. Another important type is temporal or historical marking. Words may be identified as archaic, obsolete, or old-fashioned. Such labels inform the reader that a lexical item is being attached to an earlier stage of language development. Historical marking is of particular importance in the interpretation of classical literature, historical documents and older translations. If a lexical item is strongly associated with a

particular geographical variety of English, it will be marked as regional or dialectal. Modern English has many regionalisms from British, American, Australian, Irish, Scottish and other varieties. Regional markers tell dictionary users that a given word may not be equally frequent or acceptable in all English-speaking communities. Social marking is the recognition of vocabulary associated with particular social groups or communities. Slang, jargon and colloquial are marked as such. They often signal the relation between social identity and language. For example, professional terminology is easily understood by specialists, but not by general speakers. Emotional and evaluative marking gives information about the positive or negative connotations of a word. Words with similar denotation can have very different emotional effects. For instance, the terms slim and skinny can both describe someone with a small body size, but the term slim is often associated with positive evaluation, while skinny may have a more negative or critical connotation, depending on context.

The marking of metalinguistic elements is very much context-related. The pragmatic meaning of a lexical unit can be different depending on the communicative situation, the speaker's intention and the relationship between the participants. A word that is acceptable in everyday conversation may not be suitable in an academic paper or official document. For example, kids is a natural way to say children in everyday conversation, but it might be replaced by children in formal academic writing. Specialists may be familiar with professional jargon but it may require explanation when communicating with a general audience. Metalinguistically marked words can also be interpreted differently based on context. In advertising, literature, social media or political discourse a slang expression may be deliberately used in an effort to create informality or promote solidarity with a given audience. Therefore, metalinguistic marking should not be interpreted as an absolute restriction. Rather, it represents a tendency concerning the typical conditions of lexical use. Of special interest is the relation of metalinguistic marking to lexicography. Dictionaries use labels to provide users with information that cannot always be inferred from a word's definition. Labels such as formal, informal, literary, dialectal, slang, and offensive help users select vocabulary according to communicative context.

Modern electronic dictionaries have expanded the possibilities of metalinguistic description. Digital lexicographic resources can provide pronunciation information, frequency data, examples from corpora, regional information, collocations, and stylistic labels. As a result, users can obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how a lexical unit functions in real communication. Metalinguistic marking is therefore not simply a

supplementary feature of dictionary entries. It is an important component of lexical description because it reflects the relationship between lexical meaning and actual language use. Metalinguistic information is also highly relevant to foreign language teaching. For example, language learners may know the dictionary definition of a word but still use it incorrectly because they are unaware of its stylistic or social restrictions. For instance, a learner may use an informal expression in a formal academic essay. Knowledge of metalinguistic markers contributes to the development of pragmatic competence and the proper selection of vocabulary. Metalinguistic marking also calls for careful attention in translation. A translator must not only reproduce the basic meaning of a word but also its register, its emotional value, its social associations and its cultural implications. Translating a slang word into a neutral expression could preserve the denotative meaning but lose the stylistic effect. In contrast, translating a formal expression into street slang may result in an awkward shift in tone. Hence, metalinguistic marking facilitates communicative equivalence and more accurate translation in different cultures and languages. Metalinguistic marking is an essential element of the semantic structure of the modern English vocabulary. It is full of information about the stylistic, social, regional, historical, emotional and functional properties of lexical units. Such marking enables the speakers and language learners to distinguish between words that are semantically related but differ in communicative value. Analysis of semantic spaces demonstrates that the lexicon should not be regarded as a simple set of words ordered only by denotative meaning. Lexical units rather form complex networks in which the conceptual meaning interacts with stylistic, pragmatic, social and cultural information. Metalinguistic marking renders these relationships more visible and thus contributes to deeper comprehension of the lexical organisation. The study of metalinguistic marking is therefore relevant for lexical semantics, lexicography, discourse analysis, translation studies and foreign language teaching. Researchers can investigate not only what words mean but how speakers use them, in what contexts they appear and what social or emotional meanings they may have. In this regard, metalinguistic marking provides a crucial link between the structural organisation of vocabulary and the practical realities of language use.

REFERENCES

1. Brewer C. Metalanguage and Labelling in English Dictionaries // The Oxford Handbook of Lexicography / Ed. by P. Durkin. — Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. — P. 488–500.
2. Cruse D.A. Lexical Semantics. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. — 310 p.

3. Geeraerts D. Theories of Lexical Semantics. — Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. — 362 p.
4. Jackson H. Lexicography: An Introduction. — London: Routledge, 2002. — 204 p.
5. Lyons J. Semantics. Vol. 1. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. — 371 p.
6. Palmer F.R. Semantics. 2nd ed. — Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. — 164 p.
7. Sakwa L.N. Problems of Usage Labelling in English Lexicography // Lexikos. — 2011. — Vol. 21, No. 1. — P. 404–421.