



SEMANTIC CHANGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS IN MODERN ENGLISH

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Abstract This mini research examines how meanings of words in English change over time and how these changes affect modern language use. Semantic change includes several processes, such as the expansion or restriction of meaning, improvement or worsening of connotation, and shifts in meaning. As stated by Ullmann (1962), changes in word meanings naturally occur in all living languages as a reflection of cultural and social evolution. By analyzing current examples, this study shows how such changes influence how people communicate, how English is taught, and how vocabulary is understood. Recognizing semantic change is important for both native speakers and learners to keep up with the evolving use of language.

Keywords: Semantic Change, Word Meaning, Modern English

Abstrak Penelitian mini ini membahas perubahan makna kata dalam bahasa Inggris serta dampaknya terhadap penggunaan bahasa di era modern. Perubahan semantik mencakup berbagai proses, seperti perluasan atau penyempitan makna, perbaikan atau penurunan konotasi, serta pergeseran makna. Seperti yang dikemukakan oleh Ullmann (1962), perubahan makna merupakan proses alami dalam setiap bahasa yang hidup karena mencerminkan perkembangan budaya, sosial, dan pengalaman manusia. Melalui analisis terhadap beberapa contoh dalam bahasa Inggris masa kini, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa perubahan makna berpengaruh pada cara berkomunikasi, proses pembelajaran bahasa, dan pemahaman kosakata. Memahami perubahan semantik menjadi penting bagi penutur asli maupun pembelajar bahasa untuk menyesuaikan diri dengan perkembangan makna yang terus terjadi.

Kata Kunci: Perubahan Makna, Arti Kata, Bahasa Inggris Modern

INTRODUCTION

Language naturally evolves as it responds to changes in society, culture, and technology. One key feature of this linguistic evolution is semantic change, which involves shifts in the meanings of words over time. This process typically unfolds gradually and reflects the way people adjust their language to fit new realities. Understanding how these changes happen is crucial for grasping how communication adapts to the needs of modern life.

Ullmann (1962) points out that changes in word meaning are a natural part of any living language, driven by social and cultural shifts. Similarly, Bloomfield (1933) highlights that speakers modify language as they face new circumstances, showing that semantic change helps express evolving ideas more effectively. These perspectives support the idea that meaning is flexible and shaped by continuous human interaction.

Lyons (1977) further explains that the meaning of a word depends on how it is used in context, and this usage can shift over time. In addition, Leech (1981) observes that semantic change often occurs for practical reasons, such as making communication clearer or more polite. These expert views emphasize that semantic change is not only a natural phenomenon but also a meaningful force in the development of modern English, impacting how people speak, teach, and learn the language today.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a library research approach within the framework of a literature review method. Instead of gathering primary data, the study relies on analyzing established writings to examine the influence of semantic change in contemporary English. According to Khatibah (2011:39), library research is not limited to reading sources, but involves a careful and systematic selection of relevant literature.

The data for this study were sourced from key linguistic works by Ullmann (1962), Bloomfield (1933), Lyons (1977), and Leech (1981), along with other academic references obtained through platforms such as Google Scholar and ResearchGate. This method provides a solid foundation for understanding the nature and impact of semantic change based on trusted academic insights.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

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No.	Word	Original Meaning	Current Meaning	Type of Semantic Change	Source
1.	Gay	Joyful, Bright	Homosexual	Semantic Shift	Asri et al., 2024
2.	Meat	All types of food (Middle English “Mete”)	Animal Flesh (food)	Narrowing	Asri et al., 2024
3.	Knight	Boy or Servant	Honorable warrior or nobleman	Amelioration	Asri et al., 2024
4.	Silly	Happy or Fortunate	Foolish or lacking intelligence	Pejoration	Asri et al., 2024
5.	Horn	Animal’s Protruding body part	Musical Instrument; drinking vessel	Broadening	Asri et al., 2024
6.	Head	Part of the body	Leader (e.g., head of department)	Metaphor	Asri et al., 2024
7.	Paper	Material made of pressed fibers	A document or written work	Metonymy	Asri et al., 2024
8.	Immoral	Not Customary	Unethical or wrong	Semantic Shift	Asri et al., 2024
9.	Web	A spider’s net	The internet	Metaphorical Extension	Asri et al., 2024
10.	Computer	A Person who performs calculations	An electronic calculating device	Technological Influence	Asri et al., 2024

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that semantic change is a natural and ongoing aspect of the English language, as shown by various examples analyzed from Asri et al. (2024). Words

like gay, meat, silly, and computer have undergone notable shifts in meaning, influenced by factors such as cultural change, technological progress, and evolving social attitudes. These changes occur through different mechanisms, including broadening, narrowing, metaphor, metonymy, amelioration, and pejoration.

Understanding these transformations is important for grasping how English is used today, interpreting older texts correctly, and supporting effective language instruction. As society and technology continue to evolve, staying aware of semantic shifts helps maintain clear and relevant communication in both spoken and written English.

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