

# THE PROBLEM OF INTERCHANGEABILITY IN SYNONYMS OF MODERN ENGLISH

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## Abstract

In this article, the author considers such an important problem for the synonymy of modern English as interchangeability. The characteristic stylistic features of synonyms, their extensive classification, scope of application, boundaries of the synonymous series, reasons for errors in use and the results of synonymous substitutions are analyzed. The dependence of interchangeability on the source of the word is revealed.

**Keywords:** synonyms, connotation, synonymic dominant, euphemisms, interchangeability, English language, classification.

## Introduction

Synonymy is one of the most controversial issues in the field of lexicology for English language learners. Despite the large number of studies and scientific papers devoted to various functions and features of synonymy, there are still disputes and discussions regarding the definition of synonyms, methods for studying them, principles of identifying and classifying synonyms, and the boundaries of the synonymous series. Grouping words is based on their similarity and opposition. Considering the similarity of meaning and difference in phonetic form, we come to the conclusion: the dictionary of any language contains words that are similar in meaning, but differ in morphemic composition, phonetic form, and use, which provides the opportunity to express the subtlest shades of meaning, emotion, and imagination. The more developed the language, the richer its lexical diversity and, consequently, the greater the opportunity for lexical choice for expressiveness and accuracy of speech. The purpose of this work is to try to identify the main problems and errors in the use of synonyms and determine what their interchangeability in modern English depends on.

## Materials and Methods

To write this article, the methods of comparison and analysis of words were used. The materials for this article were dictionaries, as well as research and scientific works of authors, the list of which is provided at the end of the article in the sources.

## Results and Discussion

An example of how synonyms function can be seen in the following: "Already in this half-hour of bombardment hundreds upon hundreds of men would have been violently slain, smashed, torn, gouged, crushed, mutilated" (R. Aldington). The synonyms smashed and

crushed are very close semantically, they are combined to give an enhanced idea of the horrors of war. The richness and clarity of language are of paramount importance, as they ensure the precision of expression of thought.

Even such a single example shows that the often-encountered definition of synonyms as words of the same language that have the same meaning, or different words denoting the same concept, is in no way correct, moreover, it leads to a misunderstanding of the problem. By the very nature of language, each word has its own history, its own peculiarity, its own contexts, in each of them lies the possibility of different connotations and an emotional component. Moreover, words with the same meaning would be useless for communication: they would overload the language, but would not enrich it. If two words exactly match in meaning and usage, the natural development of the situation would be either a change in the meaning of one of them, or the loss of one of them from the language.

Thus, synonyms are words that are similar but not identical in meaning. R.S. Ginzburg gives the following definition: Synonyms are two or more words of the same language, belonging to the same part of speech and possessing one or more identical or almost identical denotational meanings, interchangeable, at least in some contexts, without a significant change in denotational meaning, but differing in morphemic composition, phonetic form, shades of meaning, connotation, style, valence and idiomatic use. In this case, additional characteristics of style, emotional coloring, valence, inherent in one of the elements of a synonymous group may be absent from one or all of the others.

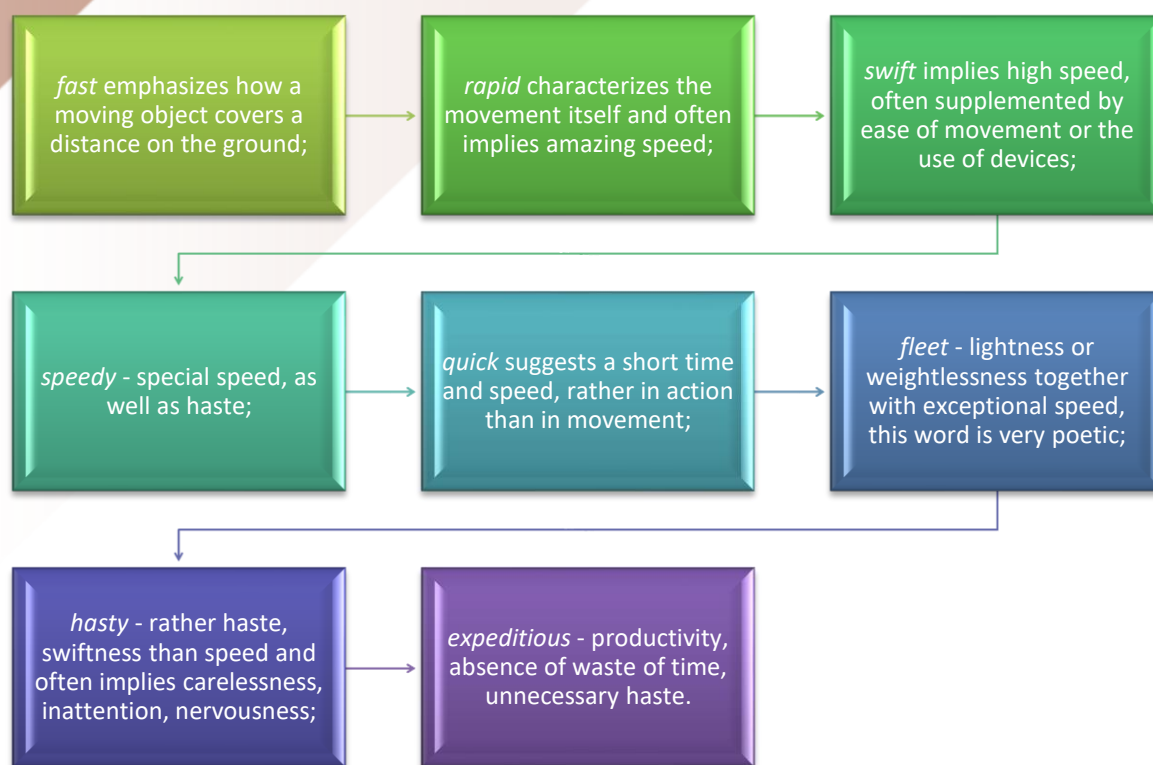
By emphasizing that the synonym belongs to the same part of speech, the definition shows that the grouping of the synonym is in fact a special case of lexical-grammatical grouping based on the semantic proximity of words. Further classification of the synonym is given based on the points of view of various researchers indicated in the sources.

Usually synonyms are distinguished from each other, they can differ in emotional or stylistic connotation, there can be a difference in meaning or valence. For example, if we consider the synonymous pair to begin – to commence, we will see that they differ in belonging to different styles of speech. The word to commence belongs to the formal (official) style, it is appropriate in official documents – a poster announces: the performance will commence, and we ask each other: when it begins. We commence hostilities/operations, but begin a quarrel / dinner. Two words denoting the same concept, having the same denotation, but different stylistic connotation, are stylistic synonyms. The words to begin – to commence are stylistic synonyms. The same applies to the pair enemy – foe.

Synonyms may differ in emotional connotation, for example, father – daddy, which coincide in denotation but differ emotionally: father is an emotionally neutral word, while daddy is an emotionally charged childish word. Such emotionally different synonyms are also called stylistic synonyms.

It is another matter when words differ in additional implication that characterizes their meaning. The verbs to tell and to relate are similar in that they mean "to convey information", but to tell implies the communication of information with explanations, and to relate is a report, usually detailed, about what the speaker saw, read, experienced, etc.

The adjectives fast, rapid, swift, fleet, quick, speedy, hasty, expeditious have a general meaning, but:



Synonyms that differ in the additional implication that forms the semantic component of the denotation are called ideographic synonyms.

Contextual or context-dependent synonyms are similar in meaning only under certain conditions. It may happen that the difference in meaning of two words is contextually neutralized, e.g. to buy and to get are not usually synonyms, but they are synonymous in the following examples: I'll go to the shop and buy some bread / I'll go to the shop and get some bread. The verbs bear and stand are semantically distinct and not interchangeable, except when used in the negative form, e.g. I can't bear it any longer / I can't stand it any longer.

In most cases, the result of synonymous substitutions is a modification of the statement. For example, "I found a large table in my room. I found a great table in my room". In the first sentence we simply state a fact, and in the second we add surprise or irritation.

The verbs to lift and to raise are interchangeable in a limited range of contexts, for example, "He raised a finger" and "He lifted a finger". But the verb to raise has a wider range of uses, for example, "to raise a voice", "to raise a question", "to raise prices", "to raise wages", etc. However, synonyms may be used in some contexts without stylistic distinctions to avoid unwanted repetition, for example, "Mor observed the youthful fullness of her face, pouting with concentration – and as he watched her he reflected to himself how rarely it was now that he met a woman" (I. Murdoch).

Some attention should be paid to different types of semantic similarity, some experts classify the following groups of words ask/ beg /implore; like / love / adore; gift / talent / genius as

synonyms, calling them relative synonyms. But this approach raises doubts, since there is a difference in denotational meaning, the words denote different concepts, and different degrees of the same concept cannot replace one another. From the above examples, it is clear that in each synonymous group there is a synonymous dominant, a word containing specific features inherent in all other members of the group, for example, undergo and hope.

In the synonymous group leave, depart, quit, retire, clear out, the verb to leave, which has the most general meaning and is stylistically and emotionally neutral, can replace all other members of the group. The other members of the group can replace to leave only when the specific semantic component should prevail over the general meaning. When we want to emphasize the idea of terminating labor activity, quit is a more appropriate word, since it is this specific meaning that dominates over the general meaning for the entire group. Examples of other synonymous dominants are to get, a verb that can replace the verbs obtain, acquire, gain, win, earn in almost any context; to ask, which has a general meaning in the synonymous group inquire, question, interrogate.

A synonymous dominant should not be confused with a generic concept. For example, animal is a generic concept compared to the specific concepts wolf, dog, mouse, etc. (which are not synonyms), while the word dog is a generic concept for various dog breeds (bull-dog, collie, poodle).

Another term worth mentioning is hyponym, or inclusion, where a more specific concept is included in a generic concept. For example, the word pup is an inclusion of the word dog; dog, in turn, is a hyponym of the word animal.

It is also necessary to keep in mind that the majority of the most frequently used words are polysemantic, have many synonyms, moreover, the same word in its different meanings belongs to different synonymous groups. This can be seen in the example of the adjective fresh in various contexts: a fresh metaphor – fresh / original / novel / striking; to begin a fresh paragraph – fresh / another / different / new; fresh air – fresh / pure / invigorating; a freshman – fresh / inexperienced / green / raw; to be fresh with smb – fresh / impertinent / rude.

The interchangeability and possible neutralization of synonyms are tested by substitution, a method borrowed from phonology. The meaning of words is determined by substituting one for another and determining the result obtained. Synonyms have a specific area of application within which they can be substituted without changing or with a very slight change in the meaning of the utterance. For example, to ask and to inquire can be interchanged if they are not followed by an addition: “Where do you live now?” he inquired.

But if there is an addition, the meaning will inevitably change, acquiring certain connotations (“And where do you work? I’ve asked you that several times”), to ask smb has a general meaning, denotes a request for information, replacement with the synonym question and interrogate will require a change in the structure of the sentence (absence of the word that), the verb question will mean that the speaker constantly asks his friend questions with bias, interrogate implies a systematic inquiry carried out by an official, and could be used ironically if the speaker’s character allows such irony.

Differences in meaning can also be established using antonyms. For example, the difference between firm and hard is obvious if you pay attention to the fact that firm contrasts with loose

and flabby (firm ground / loose ground; firm chin / flabby chin), while the antonym of hard is soft (hard words / soft words). The words strange, odd, queer, which have different connotations, are often interchangeable, since they can be used as definitions of the same words or words denoting the same concept: strange feeling (glance, business), odd feeling (glance, business), queer feeling (glance, business).

In English there are also numerous pairs of synonymous derivatives, one word has Greek, the other Latin origin, for example, periphery / circumference; hypothesis / supposition; sympathy / compassion; synthesis / composition.

But the example of stylistic relations given above is not universal, for example, the “native” words dale, deed, fair are poetic equivalents of borrowed synonyms valley, act, beautiful.

The role of borrowings in the emergence of synonyms in the language should not be exaggerated. Synonyms also arise in the course of word formation of various types. For example, phrasal verbs contribute to an increase in the number of synonyms: to choose / to pick out; to abandon / to give up; to continue / to go on; to enter / to come in; to lift / to pick up; to postpone / to put off; to quarrel / to fall out; to return / to bring back.

A more common way of forming synonyms is a combination of a noun with a verb stem with a verb of general meaning (have, give, get, make), which differs from a simple verb in some aspects: to laugh / to give a laugh; to sigh / to give a sigh; to walk / to take a walk; to smoke / to have a smoke; to love / to fall in love; to read / to have a read.

The source of synonyms from a sociolinguistic point of view are euphemisms, words that have a more pleasant or less offensive connotation, for example, poor / underprivileged; naked / in one's birthday suit; pregnant / in the family way; lodger / paying guest; to die / to pass away. Often a euphemism is a scientific term that sounds less offensive due to its obscurity, for example, drunkenness / intoxication; sweat / perspiration.

## **Conclusion**

The paper examines such important phenomena for synonymy as compatibility and interchangeability of English words. Each word of a synonymous series should be synonymous not only with the main word, but also with all other words of the given group. This means that any one meaning should be characteristic of all members of the synonymous series. When differentiating synonyms, the stylistic moment comes first, then more significant differences are discovered. As we can see, synonyms, naming the same thing, always differ in something. However, these differences necessarily imply their nominative community, which determines the main property of synonyms, the possibility of replacing one word with another in certain contexts. The complexity of using synonyms shows the diversity, richness and history of the modern English language, which is directly reflected if not in business, then in fiction.

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