

SEMANTIC EVOLUTION OF QUANTITATIVE WORDS

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The semantic evolution of quantitative words is considered in the article. The attention is focused on lexical parallels of the English Numerals. Perspective vectors of further research are analyzed.

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Conference participant

By semantic evolution we understand the modifications which are undergone by quantitative words. They are referring to both discrete and non-discrete denotates. In the article we focus our attention on Numerals, on the one hand, and the words of weight and measure, on the other. The former refer to discrete nouns, the latter – to non-discrete ones. Both realize the quantitative function, which is actualized at different language levels – grammatical, lexical and phrasological. The idea is that modern counting words were once the words of substance which had been modified with times.

Alongside with Numerals there are English numeric words *brace*, *pair*, *couple* make the study of which is important for understanding the major stages of quantity cognition. In modern English grammar dual number category is absent [2, 27]. Words expressing the concept of the dual number refer to various lexical groups: *double* – adj.; *to double* – v.; *both* – pr.; *brace* – n., which are simple in their structure.

The word *brace* is of the Roman origin reflects the role of the hand in the quantitative cognition; it has the meaning of 'two hands'. Denotative meaning of this word had been connected with the domain 'yoke of animals'. In semantic structure *brace* includes the meaning of parity. This word is also used as a component of a quantitative attribute to defined words: – *a brace of hundred pounds*, *a brace of thousands*. Word *brace* is used ironically in expressions: *a brace of two*, *a brace of duke*, *thirty brace of grouse*.

The meaning of parity is worded by *couple* and *pair*. The lexeme *couple* belongs to the Latin words and is associated with the meaning of 'yoke' and 'what unites the two'. With the times, the word came to mean parity, cf.: – *a couple of girls*, *a couple of partners*.

In agricultural vocabulary *brace* means 'sheep with a lamb'. *Couple* is homonymous in singular and plural forms, cf.: – *a twenty couple of dogs*, *a couple of eggs*, *three couple of dollars*. The word *couple* refers to objects, people and animals [6].

The word *pair* is a synonym to *couple* and nominates a certain correspondence of denotates. *Pair* correlates with words nominating paired items [5], cf.: – *pair of ears*, *pair of lips*, *pair of arms*, *pair of hands*, *pair of legs*, *pair of shoes*, *pair of sleeves*, *pair of trousers*. The word *pair* has identical singular and plural forms. *Couple* indicates the number of two referring to goods, animals and people. *Pair* identifies a specific group, cf.: – *We got some eggs* – *would you like a couple?* (Ben Elton, p. 327). *A couple of children were playing marbles* (Donald E. Westlake, p. 163). *She resolved to buy him a new pair of jeans* (Jill Mansell, p. 111). *Students work alone or in pairs* (Linda Warren, p. 174).

Thus, *brace*, *couple* and *pair* are used in English to refer to the dual number, parity, making a set of synonyms in the hyponymic relation to Numeral *two*. The same *parity* is restricted in its usage. Word *brace* is used basically to nominate two animals in question; *pair* and *couple* refer to both – animals and humans; they have a wider range of operation.

The concept of the dual number is categorized in free and stable phrases [1] in the following models: pr. + n. (*double love*); adj. + n. (*both members*); v. + adv. (*to read twice*). Stable combinations resonate the direct meaning of primary expressions of the type *two minds are better than one*. Expressions of the type *two by four* illustrate the loss of prior semantic meanings; they refer to indefinite number or small number [4, 37-39]. Some linguistic units work wonders on the verge of syntax and phraseology domains [3].

Word *score* borrowed from the Scandinavian language nominates *a group of sheep counted by 20 pieces*. Universally, in all languages one can trace the words of counting the sources of which were motivated by the nature of counted things, their parts – (animals were counted by heads, channels – by springs, trees – by roots, etc. [5, 58-68]. Counting words used to indicate syncretically both the meaning of substances and numerality. Numerals are used in reference to rigorous succession of numbers, counting words are used selectively. Morphologically both groups (Numerals and counting words) come to be alike in their isomorphic aspects relating to their semantic deviations, syntactical functional and pragmatic valuation.

Alongside with the words of *parity*, there are quantitative units of an indefinite number, cf.: *a school of fish*, *a team of dogs*, *a bale of cotton*, *a nest of ducks*, *a pile of books*. Countable nouns of discrete nature correlate with quantifiers – *many*, (*a*) *few*; while uncountable nouns with *much*, *little*. This phenomenon goes back to earlier periods of English [4]. They say, words of measure and weight originated from names of somatic nature (nail, foot), tools (pole, chain, rod), land (hide, acre), glassware (pint, ton, gallon). Words of weight and measure came into being later than Numerals and, due to this their primary meaning of substance is kept until now [5, 24-29].

Thus, the quantitative words are of the secondary derivative nature which is proved by their retrospective and perspective vectors of linguistic evolution. Synchronically, at present time their quantitative function is prior. Quantitative words are open in their polyfunctionality of meanings and forms. The question of the epigrammatic status awaits its further exploration.

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