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**The Study of Language**

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**Lesson Three**

**Lexical Relations**

**Not only can words be treated as "containers" of meaning, or as fulfilling "roles" in events, they can also have "relationships" with each other. In everyday talk , we often explain the meanings of words in terms of their relationships. If we're asked the meaning of the word conceal, for example, we might simply say, "It's the same as hide." or give the meaning of shallow as "the opposite of deep," or the meaning of daffodil as "a kind of flower." In doing so, we are characterizing the meaning of each word, not in terms of its component features, but in terms of its relationship to other words. This approach is used in the semantic description of language and treated as the analysis of lexical relations . The lexical relations we have just exemplified are :**

**Synonymy (conceal / hide),**

**Antonymy (shallow / deep) and**

**Hyponymy (daffodil / flower).**

**Synonymy**

**Synonyms are two or more words with very closely related meanings. They can often, though not always, be substituted for each other in sentences. In the appropriate circumstances, we can say,**

**What was his answer? or**

**What was his reply?**

**with much the same meaning. Other common examples of synonyms are the pairs:**

**almost / nearly**

**big / large**

**broad / wide**

**buy / purchase**

**cab / taxi**

**car / automobile**

**freedom / liberty .**

**We should keep in mind that the idea of "sameness" of meaning used in discussing synonymy is not necessarily “total sameness." There are many occasions when one word is appropriate in a sentence, but its synonym would be odd. For example, whereas the word answer fits in the sentence :**

**Sandy had only one answer correct on the test .**

**The word reply would sound odd.**

**Synonymous forms may also differ in terms of formal versus informal uses. The sentence :**

**My father purchased a large automobile .**

**has virtually the same meaning as :**

**My dad bought a big car .**

**with four synonymous replacements, but the second version sounds much more casual or informal than**

**the first.**

**Antonymy**

**Antonyms are two words with opposite meanings. Some common examples are the pairs:**

**alive / dead , big / small, fast / slow, happy / sad,**

**hot / cold, long / short, male / female, married / single, old / new, rich / poor, true / false.**

**Antonyms are usually divided into two main types, "gradable" (opposites along a scale) and "non-gradable" (direct opposites). Gradable antonyms, such as the pair big / small, can be used in comparative constructions like :**

**I'm bigger than you and**

**A pony is smaller than a horse.**

**Also, the negative of one member of a gradable pair does not necessarily imply the other. For example, the sentence My car isn't old, doesn't necessarily mean My car is new.**

**With non-gradable antonyms (also called "complementary pairs"), comparative constructions are not normally used. We don't typically describe someone as deader or more dead than another. Also, the negative of one member of a non-gradable pair does imply the other member. That is,**

**My grandparents aren't alive .**

**does indeed mean**

**My grandparents are dead.**

**Other non-gradable antonyms in the earlier list are the pairs:**

**Male / female, married / single and true / false.**

**Reversive Antonyms :This type means "do the reverse." Other common examples are :**

**Enter / exit , pack / unpack , lengthen / shorten ,**

**raise / lower , tie / untie.**

**Hyponymy**

**Hyponymy is the lexical relation in which the meaning of one word is included in the meaning of another, e.g. a rose is a hyponym of flower**

**Examples are the pairs:**

**Animal / dog , dog / poodle , vegetable / carrot,**

**flower / rose, tree / banyan.**

**The concept of "inclusion" involved in this relationship is the idea that if an object is a rose, then it is necessarily a flower, so the meaning of flower is included in the meaning of rose . Or, rose is a hyponym of flower.**

**When we consider hyponymous connections, we are essentially looking at the meaning of words in some type of hierarchical relationship.**

**We can say that "horse is a hyponym of animal" or**

**"cockroach is a hyponym of insect." In these two examples, animal and insect are called the superordinate (= higher-level) terms. We can also say that two or more words that share the same superordinate term are co-hyponyms. So, dog and horse are co-hyponyms and the superordinate term is animal.**

**The relation of hyponymy captures the concept of "is a kind of," as when we give the meaning of a word by saying, "an asp is a kind of snake."**

**It is worth emphasizing that it is not only words for "things" that are hyponyms. Words such as punch, shoot and stab, describing "actions," can all be treated as co-hyponyms of the superordinate term injure.**