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SOCIAL IMPACT ON THE SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENT: THE ADJECTIE 'GREEN'

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Abstract

This article aims to give an account of the appearance of new meanings in the semantic structure on the example of the English colour adjective 'green'. Alongside with the analysis of the semantic models of descriptive (qualitative) adjectives, the social factors influencing the appearance of the new meaning 'relating to the protection of the environment' are studied. Firstly, a comprehensive semantic analysis was carried out, summarizing the conclusions of the diachronic analysis of the semantic transformations in the word. The study shows that the metaphorical and metonymical meanings of the adjective originate not from property itself but properties of typical things of this colour (green fruit, green grass, etc.). The diachronic analysis shows numerous cases of semantic transformations. The extension of combinability of the adjective makes metonymical meaning possible. Describing an exotic, or unusual object, the adjective develops metaphorical meanings. For the adjective 'green', those are the properties of fragility, freshness, tenderness of green shoots filled with water, unprocessed green grains, etc. Secondly, in the focus of study was the meaning 'concerned with or supporting protection of the environment as a political principle' with its discourse variants. The metaphorical model of the semantic shift, the semantic properties implied are viewed through the prism of the demand of the social-political movement. The theoretical significance of the study consists of deepening the understanding of the semantics of the vocabulary, and its dependence on the social factors' dynamics.

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1. Introduction

This article presents a case study of semantic cognitive processes in a descriptive adjective '*green*'. On the one hand, this adjective in its semantic structure possesses the meaning that rises from the social movement of the recent decades and gives food for thorough investigation of the role of sociolinguistic factor in the development of the semantics of the polysemantic word.

On the other hand, the adjectives of colour the best representatives of descriptive adjectives ("qualitative" in Russian philological tradition). The latter are contrasted to denominal ("relative") adjectives, sharing most of their semantic derivation mechanisms with their noun prototypes. As the previous study shows, the semantic peculiarities of relative adjectives include "projectivity" – the ability to reflect semantic structures of basic nouns (Vinogradova, 2015; 2017). Qualitative adjectives, including adjectives of colour, are predicate words, ('predikatnye slova/ priznakovye slova' - the term commonly used in Russian linguistics to refer to all groups of words capable of denoting properties, i.e., denoting some quality or action (Nikitin, 1997, p. 598). They may be said to form the prototypical component of the adjectival category, as it is the qualitative property that would appear to have a primary perceptive basis, as well as belonging mostly to the cognitive domain of the basic level identifying the major ontological categories. Their function is to predicate autonomous properties to nouns, and their semantic processes are rather complex and depend on their collocation schemes.

2. Problem Statement

Adjectives have a distinct semantic structure development related to their predicative semantics. Adjectives of colour actualise a predicate concept and denote an autonomous property referring to a sensory image. However, in a discursive use, it is included as a property in a concept represented by a thing-word. This characteristic means that semantic studies have to view the adjective in prototypical links with the described noun since adjectival semantic derivation processes can only appear in them. That is what Nikitin (1997) wrote about Sulimenko (2012) calls those adjectival-nominal structures filters revealing the meaning of an adjective. This point of view on semantic processes of adjectives is shared by Rakhilina (2007) who believes that, for adjectives in attributive structures, the context is dictated by the semantics of the described noun.

The semantics of adjectives was studied in detail by Rakhilina et al. (2009) using Russian-language material. The author develops the idea of Wierzbicka (1985) that colour corresponds to its standard object, which means that colours in language are not abstract but related to certain meaningful external objects associated with a particular colour. Postnikova (2018), describing the nature of reference in attributive words, using German adjectives as an example, states that adjectives denoting colours are denotation-orientated.

Thus, studying the processes of semantic derivation in an adjective of colour in English, we will take into account its collocation with the relevant nouns, not only the image of the property.

3. Research Questions

Research questions of this study are peculiarities of the semantic transformation patterns that the adjective 'green' shares with the rest of descriptive (qualitative) adjectives and the social factors of the development of its new meanings.

The main questions to answer are those: what are the peculiarities of the semantic derivation processes in the semantic structure of the colour adjective 'green'; what properties that lead to semantic transformations of the primary meaning; what direction and configuration of semantic changes the analysis shows, to what patterns these changes refer.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to reveal the sociolinguistic basis and the mechanisms of the semantic derivation of the descriptive (qualitative) adjective 'green', to study the direction and configuration of semantic transference processes of the adjective and for this reason, the diachronic approach should be used.

5. Research Methods

Contextual analysis, definitional analysis, and the method including the semantic transformation based on the diachronic approach were used.

6. Findings

In modern English dictionaries (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2020; Oxford English Dictionary, 2016), the semantic structure of the adjective '*green*' is as follows:

1. colour between blue and yellow; of the colour of grass;
2. covered with grass, trees, and other plants;
3. not ready (especially of fruit) to eat, or (of wood) not dry enough to use;
4. not experienced or trained
5. relating to the protection of the environment (CDO).

The last meaning is presented as 'concerned with or supporting protection of the environment as a political principle': *official Green candidates*; and 'not harmful to the environment' (of a product or service) in other dictionaries.

An analysis of the semantic structure shows that, apart from the first, non-derivative meaning, there are metonymic ones (2, 3, and 5) and a metaphoric one (4).

To analyse the processes of semantic derivation, we have to refer to a historical dictionary (OED) to track the direction and sequence of semantic transitions.

6.1. Metonymy

We will view the metonymic meanings of the adjective first. As we know, metonymy is a contiguity-based type of semantic derivation. For an adjective, it can be contiguity of attributes in the same object (their co-occurrence) or contiguity of attributes in different objects.

The analysis shows that all of the metonymic meanings of 'green' are based on the prototypical substantive link of 'green grass/ plant'.

1.Andlang ðæs wuduweȝes on ðone grene pað. (1045);

In example 1, '*green path*', the metonymy appears as a result of attribute reassignment: "path, covered with *green grass → green path*", resulting in a whole-part metonymy. Hence, *green land* – land <covered with a growth of herbage or foliage; verdant> of green colour. Nikitin (1997) calls this type of attributive adjectival metonymy contractional because, apart from reassignment, the middle component is contracted: *a path <covered with grass> of the colour green.*

2.A *green Christmas* is neither handsome nor healthfull. (1513);

Similarly, in example 2 '*green time (Christmas)',* the metonymy is a result of a reassigned attribute: "time <when plants are> green – green time. Consequently, apart from the general attributes '*green time'* – <full of life, flourishing>, another meaning appears: <mild, temperate, characterized by abundance of verdure>.

3.Hurte the *grene blade*, & you shall haue no whete there (1526).

4.My dear, this is worse than eating *green apples* (1872)

Examples 3 and 4 are a classic case of implication of attributes occurring in the same object: 'green and unripe" (fruit) and 'green and tender' (shoot). In the classification that we use, the type is called simple adjectival metonymy based on co-occurrence of attributes.

Example 3 shows a similar model of simple adjectival metonymy. The meaning of 'tender, fragile' is also based on the implication of co-occurring attributes in green and therefore gentle and fragile shoots.

In the case of metonymy, meaning is formed in a single domain, such as in example 4, where the colour attribute 'green' referring to the noun 'apple' is associated with a different property of the fruit, 'unripe', which develops further: 'not good for eating'.

The model of simple adjectival metonymy can similarly actualise meanings that equally may or may not get entrenched in the semantic structure of an adjective (and may not be specifically described in dictionaries but appear in a discourse): unripe, immature; young and tender; full of vigorous life, flourishing; retaining the natural moisture, not dried, not cooked.

6.2. Metaphor

A metonymic shift leads to an occurrence of a semantic relation within the same conceptual area, whereas a metaphoric shift moves a lexeme from one domain to another. According to Lakoff (1987), a metaphor is based on the interaction between two conceptual areas: the source area and the target area. It is based on mapping of structural elements of one area on the other.

Fauconnier (1994) believes that this transition requires a "structural symmetry" of the respective frames in order to find a correspondence between the slots. The author based the famous "surgeon is a butcher" blend analysis on that.

At the same time, the authors point out that a metaphor in attributive words "clearly shows a transition from one taxonomic class (domain) to another" (Rakhilina, 2007, p. 411). First of all, it is a transition of a property from a physical area to a non-physical one, i.e. the area connected with mental, emotional, social, and similar human-specific characteristics (Ibid.)

To put it otherwise, used with nouns representing concepts in the same domain, adjectives develop metonymic meanings (Sweetser, 1990, p. 19). When the taxonomic class (=domain) changes, the metonymy semantically develops into a metaphor (Nikitin, 1997; Paducheva, 2004).

The same principle creates the metaphoric meaning of the adjective '*green*' <full of life>, both in relation to a person and their age. The metaphor develops from a simple adjectival metonymy, and the property of youth and being full of life is attributed to a human being as the domain changes.

Their fresh and greene bodies (1619) (OED).

Old Benchers, He is yet in green and vigorous senility (1821) (OED).

The implication of the attributes of 'green' and 'immature' brings about the metaphoric meaning '*green*' <immature> in relation to a person:

This is affirmed of them that were ful sage And specially whyle they be grene of age (1412) (OED).

He wol speke wordes grene, Er þen hue buen rype (1300) (OED).

But these are green resolves (1872) (OED).

Hence one more metaphoric meaning: <simple, gullible; characterized by, or displaying, simplicity>.

You're green, your credulous; easy to be blinded (1605) (OED).

For example, a fresh (not dried) water-containing product of any colour can be metaphorically called green: *green corn* <the unripe and tender ears of maize, commonly cooked as a table vegetable>. In this case, the unripe condition of corn is its positive property. With wood, it is negative: *green wood or vegetable products*: that has not been prepared by drying; hence, not ready for use or consumption (not thoroughly dried, unseasoned) (OED). The same is true about wine: '*green wine*' <unmatured>. The attribute 'green' as 'not dried, retaining water' can be used about other physical objects: †*green bones*: < full of marrow >, e.g. in the phrase 'to keep the bones green' (OED).

The implication of the attributes <green> and <fresh> is particularly common: green wound <recent, unhealed>.

To winchestre he was ilad al mid is grene wounde (1297) (OED).

The obsolete idiom '*green in earth*' also contains the meaning <recent>: 'green in earth' = just buried.

Where bloody Tybalt, yet but greene in earth, Lies festring in his shrow'd (1592) (OED).

Discursive modifications of the metaphoric meaning of the adjective '*green*' <fresh> develop in relation to various objects: *green fish* <freshly killed or taken>, *green meat* < uncooked>, *green bacon* <undried, unsmoked>, etc.

Of these [swine] some we eat greene for porke, and other dried vp into bakon (1577) (OED).

The metaphor of freshness as the state of being unprocessed also develops in relation to non-food objects: *green hide* <raw, unseasoned>, *green clay* <unfired>:

A yong man was wrapped together with a dogge and a serpent in a greene oxe hyde, and caste into the deapth of the sea (1577) (OED).

When the clay is in one peculiar state, called the green state (1825) (OED).

6.3. Socio-political metaphor 'green – ecological'

The meaning of the adjective *green* 'relating to the protection of the environment' (CDO) appears in the 20th century when German environmentalists started calling themselves 'the Greens' (die Grünen). In the English language, the meaning penetrated as a part of a translation-loan from German 'Grüne Aktion Zukunft' – 'Green Campaign for the Future'. Therefore, the association of the colour green with the environmentalist lobby dates from the early 1970s in West Germany. Nowadays the adjective green is widely used in the meaning 'related to the protection of the environment.

'Green' bans have been introduced by the New South Wales Building and Construction Workers' Union (1973).

European politics are turning green; or so the ecologists would have us believe (1978) (OED).

On another continent parallel to Europe the word '*green'* was used in the name of the organisation Greenpeace which in 1971performed the first action against nuclear tests took place in the USA. The organisers of the action used a small ship on the scull of which they wrote the name of their group 'Green Peace' solidly for the lack of space.

Since then, the word *green* has become a political term globally; it is equally understood in many languages. The reason of its effectiveness as an ecological metaphor lies in its developed semantic structure: green is associated with the green, untouched, clean nature, the green vegetation, not fading or tainted.

As in the analysis above, the metaphor is based on the links with the described noun, in this case *vegetation*, further the attribute is generalised and dissociated from its substantive link and gives way to discursive variations: *green planet* – clean, verdant; *green home* – less harmful to the environment; *green product* – ecologically clean, not harmfull. The latter comes from the German "die Grűne Punkt" – the Green Dot, the license symbol for the environment-friendly recyclable packaging.

The implication of *green* as clean and safe is widely used in the political sphere underlying the aspiration of the politicians to protect and keep the planet green. Many parties today are called the Greens, the term being an ellipsis of the names of different parties in Europe: Green List in Italy, Green Alliance in Ireland and Finland, Green Alternatives in Austria, Green Ecology Party in Sweden, Ecologist Party in Belgium:

The Greens are more likely to take votes from the Social Democrats and the Liberals than from the Christian Democrats (1978) (OED).

7. Conclusion

We, therefore, have to note that semantic processes in descriptive (proper predicative) adjectives have their peculiarities:
- the main feature of the semantic derivation of proper descriptive adjectives is that their metonymic and metaphoric meanings development is based on the links of those adjectives with

the described nouns rather than directly from their primary meanings. In semantics, those collocations are usually called 'substantive bases' or 'modelling prototypes'. Those collocations form a range of inferences of possible semantic transformations. For the adjective 'green', these are the properties of fragility, freshness, tenderness, green shoots filled with water, unprocessed green grains, etc.

▪ the substantive base 'green vegetation' is a source of the development of o socio-political metaphor 'green- ecological, protecting the environment'; the appearance of this meaning in the semantic structure of the word is the result of the influence of the extra-linguistic factor – the movement for the protection of the environment.

▪ the predicative metonymy is manifest in either a focus on one of the co-occurring attributes (simple adjectival metonymy) or attribute reassignment in the described objects (with a contraction of the middle component). The attribute application area remains the same, and the metonymic semantic transformations occur in the same domain or classification field.

▪ another feature of the semantic transformation of adjectives is the step-by-step development of a metonymic process into a metaphoric one, which is typical for adjectives. The transition from metonymy to metaphor happens when the object's taxonomic class or domain changes.

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