University "St. Kliment Ohridski" – Bitola
Faculty of Education – Bitola
ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01

SENSE RELATION IN VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

Alda Jashari (Cicko)
Fan. S. Noli University, Korce, Albania
aldajashari@ymail.com

Abstract

Foreign language teachers must select vocabulary carefully to ensure that high quality items are included and provide varied opportunities for practice. Teachers should pay the most prudent attention in organization of lexis for the classroom as to offer as wide a range of practice ideas in order to facilitate effective learning. Acquiring a large, coloured and nuanced vocabulary knowledge does not imply simply studying a list of words alongside with dictionary definitions. Language diversity implies great possibilities of lexical choice as means of enhancing the effectiveness and accuracy of speech. Modern foreign languages teaching methods should aim at building a broad, deep, rich and flexible vocabulary corpus of words. Grouping of words is based upon similarities and contrasts. Every language has in its lexicon a variety of words, kindred in meaning, but distinct in morphemic composition and usage, ensuring the expression of the most delicate and somehow hidden shades of human perception, thought, feeling and imagination. The use of synonyms and antonyms is a quick and effective way of explaining unknown words and teachers can resort to them as means of describing words' meanings.

Key words; synonyms, antonyms, lexical choice, vocabulary acquisition, meaning

1. Introduction

The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter- tis the difference between the lighting bug and the lighting

Mark Twain

As Gains and Redman have pointed out "Some of the most amusing errors a learner can make in a foreign language arise from the lack of awareness of appropriacy of items" [Gairns and Redman 1998, 5] and the appropriate choice of synonyms seems to be one of the most struggling challenges both teachers and students might come across. Kevin Flanigan emphasizes the fact that "a powerful vocabulary consists of more than simply knowing a lot of words; it is the ability to grasp the just the right words to communicate precisely what you want to say or write" [Flanigan 2015, 2]. The meaning of the word can be only understood and learned in terms of its relations with the other words. An alternative way of conveying the meaning of a new word is simply to use words-other words. Teachers should constantly raise their students' interest on semantic relations and emphasise the need for approaching lexical choice and meaning variety as straightforwardly and remarkably as possible.

2. How to teach sense relations based on similarities (synonyms)

According to Lyons "words' meaning can be descriptive, expressive and social and many lexemes combine two of these or all of three. If synonymy is defined as identity of meaning, then lexemes can be said to be completely synonyms if and only they have if they have the same descriptive, expressive and social meaning" [Lyons 1981, 148]. As stated by many scholars, if synonymy is described as identity of meaning then lexemes can be said to be absolute synonyms if they have the same the same distribution and are completely synonymous in all their meanings (figurative meanings comprised). It is generally recognized that absolute synonymy of lexemes is relatively rare and as it is defined, is almost non-existent. The degree of interchangeability of two lexical items is undoubtedly, conditioned to a significant extent by the very complex structure of polysemous words, especially indicated by the integration of the connotative element, the stylistic reference, dialect, affective value,

ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01

collocation or indirect and moderate choice of lexical units(euphemisms). The choice of synonyms in teaching vocabulary process is challenging and often not too easy to overcome. It is teachers' duty to give a fully depicted picture of words' meaning complexity startingly by introducing to their class a designed scheme of semantic componential analysis aspiring at the evaluation of the constituent elements especially reinforcing the need for a full awareness of the sense-related differences that may be directly indicators for an accurate choice of synonyms in given contexts.

Let us illustrate the point by providing some examples on how to describe the meanings of the following words by exploring the embedment of the connotative emotive values which directly determine the selection of words. Gairns and Redman suggest that the teachers will need to highlight the aspect of connotation, particularly in cases where the denotational meaning alone does not explicit the attitudinal force of a word [Gairns and Redman 1998, 18]. The figurative, emotive or evaluative associations should be clarified. Connotation is a permanent striking feature of every language thus students will not find this approach insuperable. Students need to know in what way the figurative "burden" is added to the denotational(literal) meaning and to what extent the words' meaning is dependent on the context. Advanced learners are expected to deal with a range of communicative activities and immense cases of linguistic interrelations of both oral and written speech and these situations will demand an understanding of the role the connotation plays in the differentiation of synonyms as a means of selection and proper use of these similarly sense related items. Of a relevant importance would be even the appreciation of the connotative values from the elementary level students. Using mother tongue translated cognates will help their general interest and awareness of the importance of this element. Here are some examples of sense relation complexity and diversity that can normally be traced in vocabulary acquisition process which should necessarily achieve emphasis in teaching English as a foreign language.

Lonely and ***alone*** might be considered as synonyms as far as the denotational component of *"being on one's own, without anyone else"* is concerned. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2006 the adjective ***lonely*** is emotively charged by the presence of the connotative component "*unhappy and sad because you have no one to talk to*". Thus, in the sentence "*You should not leave a child*----- between the two alternatives, the right one would be **alone.** The teacher him or herself can ask the student to make a sentence using the other component of the synonymic pair.

Another pair of synonyms demonstrating the same noticeable complexity is **well known** and **notorious**. The negative evaluative embedded connotation value as "*famous or widely known for something bad*" [Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2006] entailed in the adjective notorious makes the choice of the synonym strictly restricted to specific contexts as in the sentence "*He was a judge-------- for his cruelty and corruption".* The use of words "cruelty" and "corruption" determine the choice of the right alternative and facilitates students' decision. Neither ***famous, well known or celebrated*** would fit the context besides ***notorious.*** At this point students must also know that **famous** and **well known** might be completely interchangeable in more than one context, as they are stylistically neutral. So, in the sentence "*Many------ people have lived in this hotel"* both alternatives might be perfectly accepted.

To shiver, **to tremble** and **to shudder** form a line of synonyms as far as they share the same denotational component that of denoting "*the act of shaking slightly in a way you cannot control"* [Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2006].The difference between these lexical units stands in the fact that there is a relevant added connotational value *that of cause* as in the case of ***to shiver*** which means "*to shake slightly because you are cold*" or a complex addition of *the connotation of cause* and the *emotive value* as in the case of **to shudder** which means *"to shake for a short time because you are afraid or because you think something is very unpleasant"* [Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2006].

Once more the teacher should absolutely point out the connotational, emotive added values and ask students to consider the context before selecting the right alternative. For instance, in the sentence "*I----- with embarrassment whenever I think about it",* the choice of the verb **shudder** is evidently conditioned by the context and more specifically by the word *embarrassment*. Whereas in the

ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01

sentence "*Jack stood--------- in the cold air",* the choice of the verb **to shiver** is once more determined by the phrase *cold air*.

Skinny and **thin** are two more excellent examples of how connotation is packed and is worth noting that this component marks the striking difference of emotive values burden. Thin means "*having little fat on your body*" whereas skinny means "*very thin, especially in a way that is unattractive*" [Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2006] indicating a pejorative attitude.

At intermediate and advanced stages of foreign language acquisition, teachers should provide full contextual examples and advice students to write many context-based sentences in order to gain a perfect command of sense related words.

2.1 Register and style

Gairns and Redman suggest that "Style and register strongly affect the impression we gain of a speaker's linguistic competence, and this is shown amongst other things by his choice of words" [Gairns and Redman 1998, 21]. The term **style** in linguistics indicates the language that can be used in a particular way, usually depending on people's behaviour flexible and adaptive to the speech situation. Style also includes the level of formality; from formal to informal, neutral, colloquial, slang etc. Dictionaries themselves have a set of labels to mark words or senses that are usually restricted and dependent in the context they may occur. Apart from the contextual indicators related to region(dialects) or historical background (archaisms), style and register is also labelled in general-purpose dictionaries. Howard Jackson in his book "An introduction the lexicography" stated that "the words characteristic of conversation and casual writing are labelled as informal usually greatly outnumbers the words characteristic of formal speech situations, academic, literary words marked as formal". Concise Oxford Dictionary 10th edition the "informal" label occurs over seven times more frequently than the "formal" label [Jackson 2002, 111]

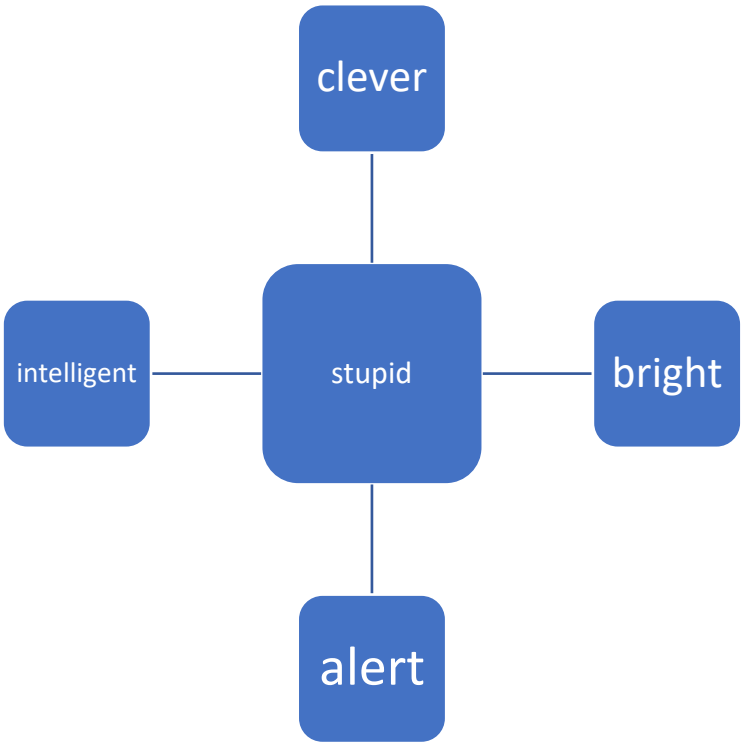
At intermediate and advanced level, there is an immediate need for the acquisition of some specialized words related to a variety of styles and specific register. Teachers should carefully identify and mark particular features of style and register by indicating what is the necessary item to be approached. In this context students should know how to use words in respect to their style and make appropriate choices in given contexts. As neutral stylistically words have a high degree of frequency and cover a wider range of collocation, the acquisition of neutral layer synonyms would be more than satisfactory to elementary level students. Whereas for advanced learners the information and a deep exploitation of words' registers and style of usage is more than appropriate. The process of defining the specific stylistic values and formality of the context in which a word is deemed to be appropriate must be governed by students' need and interest. The teachers' role in this process is to intentionally select the lexical items and what features to explore. For example, the word **children** is neutral in style, whereas **nippers, kids** and **brats** are colloquial. Moreover, **nippers** is humorous, whereas **brats** is derogatory. Another example would that of referring to the synonymic line **to leave**, **to abandon**, **to desert**, **to forsake**, it is of great importance to teach to the students that **to leave** and **to abandon** are stylistically neutral, whereas **to desert** is poetic and **to forsake** is formal.

3. How to teach sense relations based on contrast (antonyms)

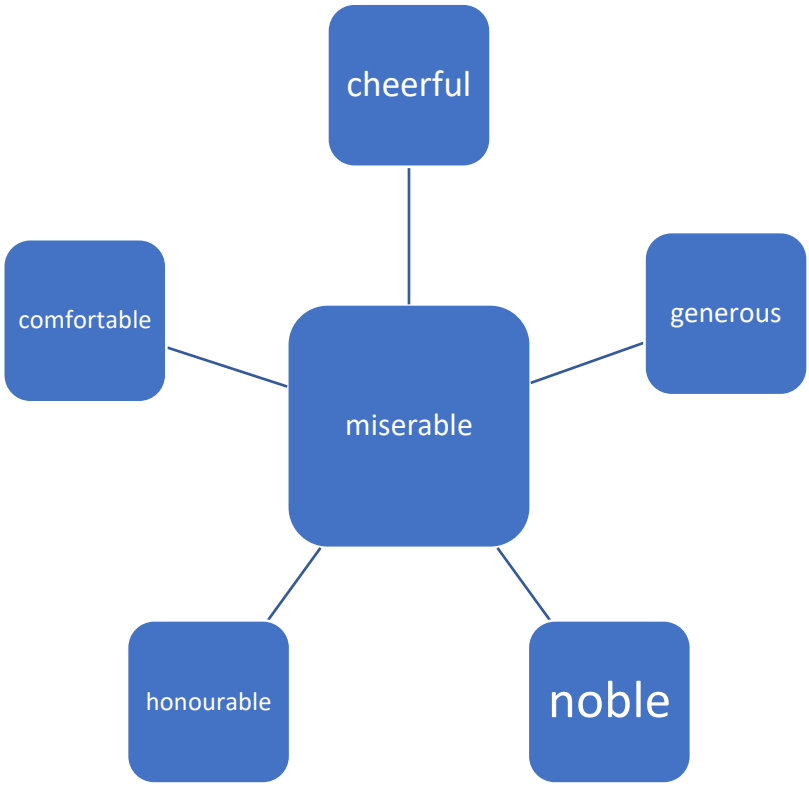
Words characterized by semantic polarity or opposite meanings represent another language's important expressive means and as such they should absolutely consider as powerful means of bridging an important gap in foreign language acquisition. There are a variety of different forms of oppositeness which are relevant to learners and teachers. The point to be made here as in the case of synonyms is that the problem of multiple senses, should be taken in account. It is worth noting that a polysemantic words may have an antonym or several antonyms for each of its meanings and quite frequently antonymic relations are established not between words, but between meanings.

Let us study the antonymic pairs that the respective adjectives; ***stupid, miserable, hard, different, slow, ugly***, can form.

ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01

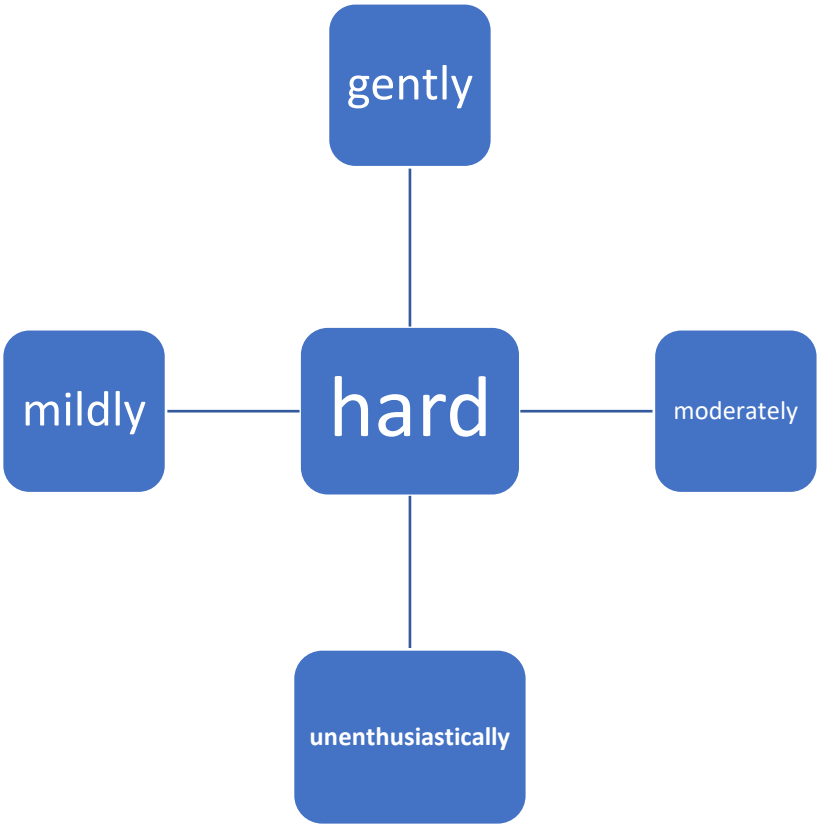


According to Chambers Pocket Thesaurus 1992, the adjective ***stupid*** can be associated to these lexical items (*clever, intelligent, bright and alert*) and form parallel antonymic pairs.

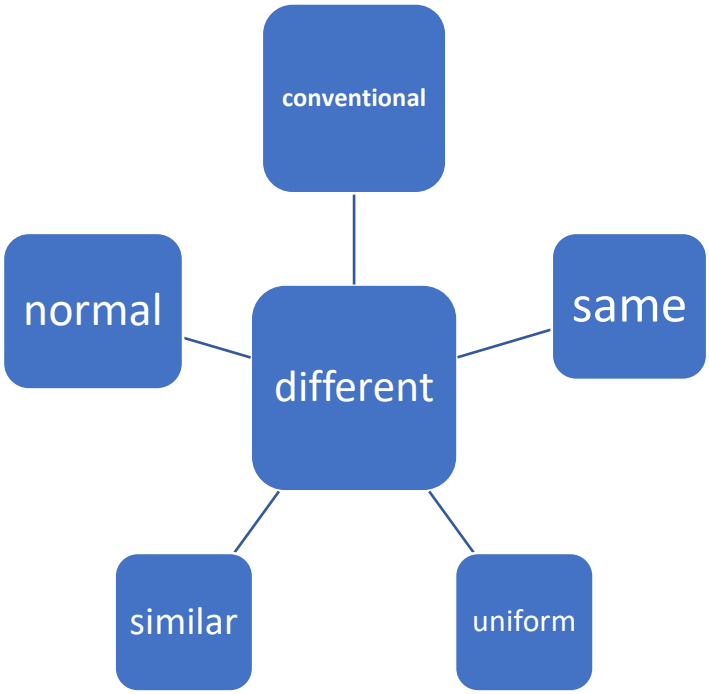


As referred to Chambers Pocket Thesarus, 1992, the adjective **miserable** on the other hand can form antonymic pairs respectively with *cheerful, generous, comfortable, generous, honourable, noble.*

ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01

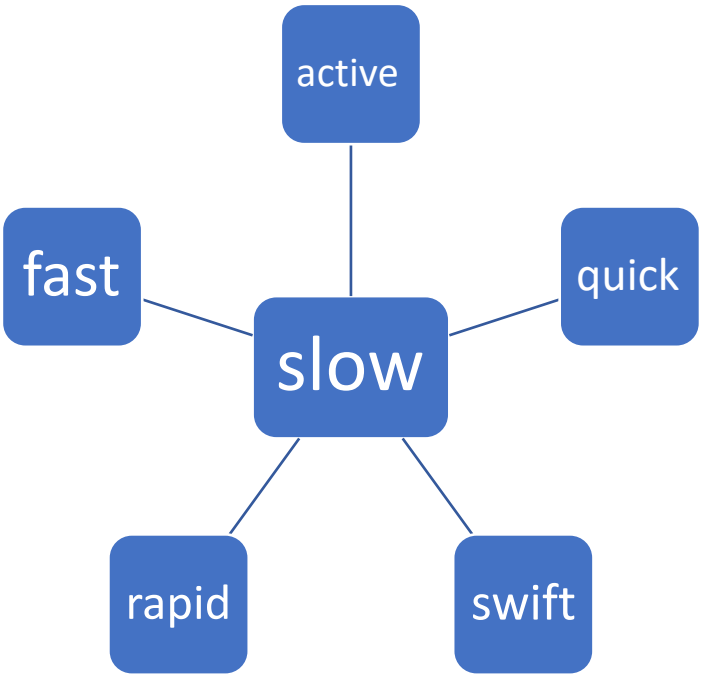


The same lexicographical source suggests the adjectives *mildly, gently, moderately and unenthusiastically* as having opposite meanings with the adjective **hard**.

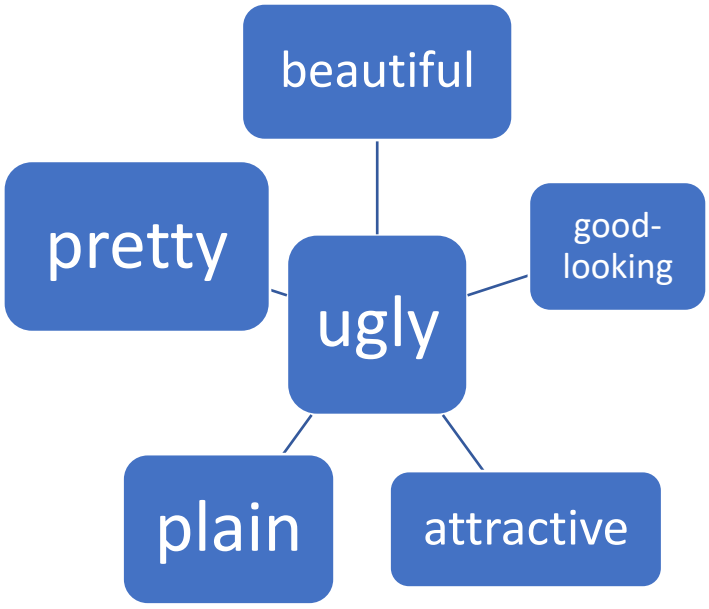


Similarly, a wide range of opposite adjectives to the word **different** such as *conventional, same, normal, similar, uniform* is recorded in Chambers Pocket Thesaurus,1992.

ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01



The adjective **slow** is referred as being antonymous with a considerable number of adjectives, including *fast, rapid, active, quick, swift* [Chambers Pocket Thesaurus,1992].



A noticeable number of adjectives such as *beautiful, good-looking, pretty, plain, attractive* form parallel antonymic pairs with the adjective **ugly** [Chambers Pocket Thesaurus,1992].

Many other examples may be added to the list. At this point, its teachers' duty to provide a satisfactory account on the complexity of establishing semantic polarity to polysemous words and to provide rich supplies of specific examples on how different meanings of the same multi sense word can be related in several remarkable ways to other word and set up distinguishable antonymic pairs as the one listed above. As most of the antonyms are adjective and verbs, the provision and the inclusion of the other element of the pair might result as an effective step especially to young learners.

ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01

Lipka calls the traditional lexical relation of antonymy "oppositeness of meaning" and distinguishes three different types of antonyms respectively complementary, converses, gradable antonyms [Lipka 1992,145]. As these sense relations are defined based on logical relationships these types of binary oppositions do present a considerable degree of difficulty while interpreting and then while teaching for the methodical purposes of vocabulary acquisition. It is worth examining these relations in greater depth as they may help to highlight the difficulties students sometimes experience if they are asked the ubiquitous question What is the opposite of…

3.1 Complementarity

It can be illustrated by pairs of words such as **male and female** or **single and married**. These are forms of antonyms which truly represent oppositeness of meaning. They cannot be graded and if one of the pair is applicable than the other cannot be. This means that the denial of one implies the assertion of the other and vice versa. They are said to be mutually exclusive, and this type of opposition is based on a yes or no decision. [Lipka 1992, 146]. This is a clear-cut area of oppositeness and a "safe" one for every common teacher question or provided task especially with elementary students especially considering the traditional questions ***What is the opposite of…?*** or ***Give the opposites to the following words***

3.2 Converses

Another type of oppositeness which would bring about another controversial issue to be considered in English classes is the existence of certain pairs of opposite lexical items characterized by relational oppositeness such as: ***husband and wife- above- below, doctor-patient, teacher-student, precede-follow***, ***before-after, in fort of-behind*** the nature of oppositeness is reciprocal. They can be as mirror-images relations or functions. There is also a parallel to antonyms in the comparative form, and thus ***bigger than*** is equivalent to ***smaller than.***

As noticed above, we cannot ask the students to give the "opposite" of the lexical items. Where there are many cases when the techniques of asking the opposite would be explicit and effective, there are obviously cases, especially where no context is given, when confusion can arise.

With converses the following technique may be acceptable especially with transformation sentences as in the examples below-

John and Marry are Ben's parents so John and Marry are……

Jim is Anna's husband, so Anna is….

John bought the car form Bill so…

James is my doctor, so I am…

3.3 Antonymy (Gradable antonyms)

Teachers should also emphasise the need for further interpretation for pairs of antonyms such as ***good/bad/ big/small, high/ low, love\hate, hot\cold*** where only the second one of the above-mentioned relationships of implication or (entailment) holds. This type of oppositeness is also termed as "polar opposition". The assertion of one member of the pair does not imply the negation of the other, but not vice-versa. [Lipka 1992, 145] **John is good** implies that **John is not bad.** But **John is not good** does not imply that **John is bad**. And what is more the difficulty increases from the fact that English lexicon has elaborated an almost limitless number of synonyms learners can benefit from, but this rich supply can sometimes multiply students' difficulties in setting up correct semantic relations between the "right" word to be selected. For example, as far as the word **bad** is concerned Chamber Pocket Thesarus 1992 has collected 85 synonyms to this lexical item, ranging from **damaging** to **criminal,** which could be at times, potentially approachable as "semantically contradicting" the adjective **good.**

Let us probe into the insight of two other adjectives semantic values. **The water is not hot** does not imply that the water is cold. However, from **the water is cold** the negation **the water is not hot** follows. Oxford Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms 2007 has displayed three opposites for the word **hot**, respectively ***cold, mild, weak*** and three for the word **cold**, ***hot, mild and warm.*** Following the previously stated logical assumption, the choice of all the options may be considered as plausible,

ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01

unless we as teachers do not reinforce the need for a full understanding of the situation and context which in a yielded ground would determine the choice of the adjective to constitute the antonymic pair.

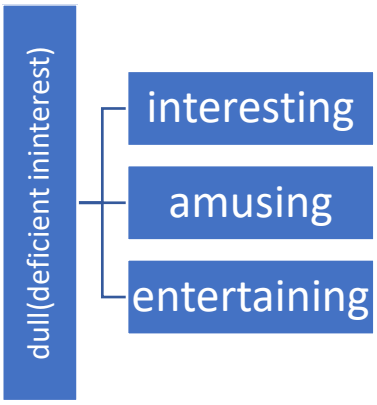
Similarly, if we compare these two sentences: ***Sue's house is big*** and ***Mary's house is small*** a logical question that may arise is: Are **big** and **small** opposites Most of the teachers might use opposition to these two antonymic pairs but are these two units opposite as ***male and female.*** In the first place Sues' house might be "*relatively big"* compared to its old house, compared to how many people live there, her income or her status. Mary's house may be "*relatively small"* in the light of the same factors. Mary and Sue may live in the same identical house, but the sentences are subjective and dependent on people's perception and opinion. Once more, a careful, detailed inquiry on situation and context-based use of these words, would facilitate students' decisions and help them approaching the selection of opposites form a different angle, apart from indispensably choosing the polar binary level of contrast following the strict already given traditional suggestions.

Another important linguistic difference of antonyms from complementary is that antonyms are always *fully gradable,* which should be considered of a special interest and consideration form the part of the teachers. They may consider providing and sharing with their students, designed schemes of scale of values that might include some of related adjectives as the one designated in the following example.



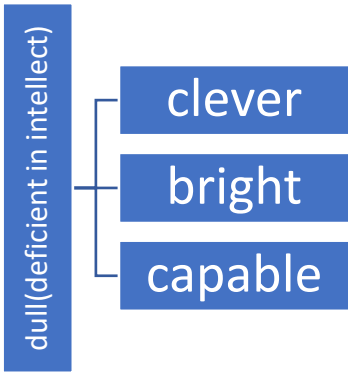
Students must be taught that there is an evident difference between ***huge*** and ***tiny*** and several alternative options, (mild and moderate ones) to denote the degree of amount from les to more without necessarily pointing at the adjectives conveying the extreme polar level of contradictory.

On the other hand, a polysemantic word may have an antonym or several antonyms for each of its meanings as in the following examples. At this point there is a call forth a direct deduction of polysemous words' semantic structure and a carefully paid attention to the grids that may be established among words' diverse derived meanings and respective oppositional counterparts that may be created. The following example clearly demonstrates and clarifies the stated complexity.

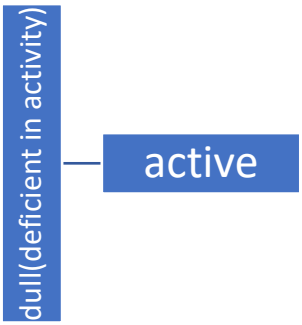


As being a polysemous word, the adjective **dull** when used with the meaning *being deficient in interest* can constitute antonymic pairs, respectively with the adjectives ***interesting, amusing*** and **entertaining** [Oxford Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms, 2007]

ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01



Due to the complexity of the semantic structure, the same adjective has acquired the meaning *"deficient in intellect*" and when in context used with this sense, the following pairs of antonyms may be established; ***dull-clever, dull-bright, dull-capable*** [Oxford Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms, 2007]

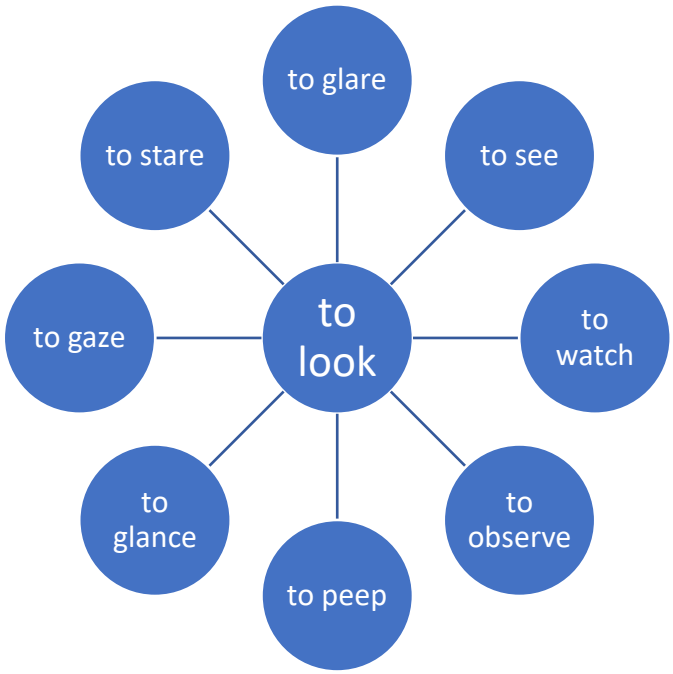


As far as the meaning "*deficient in activity"* is conceived, there is another word contributing on the constitution of the antonymic pair, the adjective **active** [Oxford Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms, 2007]

As sense relations can be used as alternative ways of conveying the meaning of a word in teaching English as a foreign language some means of explanation and clarification of the meanings are listed as below.

a-Introducing synonymic lines as to extend and empower students' vocabulary can also provide a satisfactory achievement. Teachers may use **association network**, drawing a diagram centred on the synonymic dominant. Students are supposed to add as many synonyms as possible, compare their network to the other students and the teacher can draw it and wait for students' suggestions to complete it. The same technique can be used for antonymic pairs.

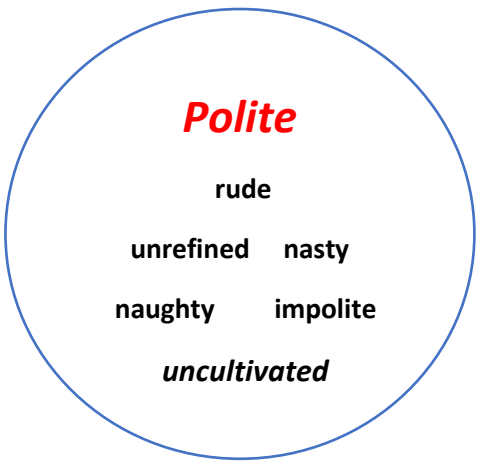
ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01

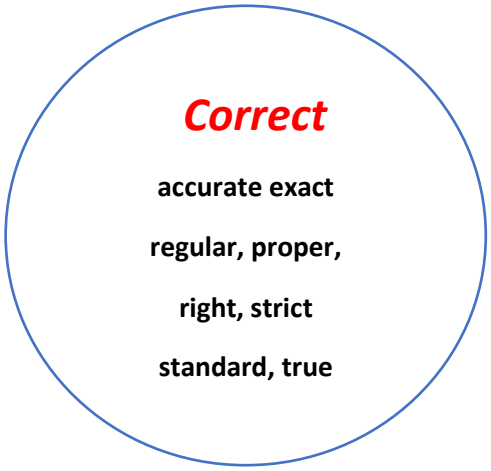


As displayed in the diagram, the verb "to look" can in several, diverse ways be sense related as being a synonym to the extended line of verbs such as ***to glare, to see, to watch, to observe, to peep, to glance, to gaze, to stare.***

b-Peer teaching. The teacher can give to each of the students in a group a card with the meaning of the words explained by a different synonym. Students should study the word silently. Then the teacher gives to gives to the group a task for example a **story-construction activity** or **a short narrative** which involves using the words. To do the task each of the student would have to explain the other members of the group the words that they have just studied.

c-Word pair race is a matching task which involves first recognizing words than pairing them with a synonym or antonym. In five minutes write as possible synonyms or antonyms to this word.





As an illustrating example introduced in the above diagram, an overwhelming number of synonymic items among which we could mention ***accurate, exact, regular, proper, right, strict, standard, true*** can be associated to the adjective **correct.** Similarly, as presented in the example above, to the already recognized adjective **polite,** the adjectives ***rude, unrefined, nasty, naughty, impolite*** and ***uncultivated*** are said to be antonyms and can be added as alternatives to complete the chart. [Chambers Pocket Thesaurus,1992]

ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.27.01

d-Pelmanism is a memory game. Word pairs are placed face down. Players, in turns, pick up a card and look for its partner. If they correctly locate the partner, they keep the pair, and have another turn.

e-For vocabulary building purposes, texts- whether written or spoken- have enormous advantages over leaning words form the list. Thornbury in his book How to teach vocabulary emphasises points out that "the fact that words are in context increases the chances of learners appreciating not only their meaning but their typical environments, such as their associated collocations" [Thornbury 2002, 53]. Different kinds of texts(genres) are likely to display different lexical and sematic features. It goes without saying that **short literary texts** offer various multiple possibilities for vocabulary development. Writers and poets can only enrich the network of word associations for the learner.

f-Gap-filling either open or closed and **multiple-choice task** can be used as production tasks to test the appropriate use of both synonyms and antonyms.

Synonyms and antonyms can also be used as sustainable ways of converting the meaning of a new word by using other words. The meaning and use of both indicators of semantic relations can be clarified in different ways, among which we could mention

1-situational presentations (providing a scenario which contextualises the target word/words and their possible clarification by using synonyms or antonyms)

2-example sentences (providing a typical instance of the target word in context)

3-dictionaries (either monolingual or thematic dictionaries offer to both teachers and learners a reliable convincing source they should rely on)

5. Conclusion

Modern English lexicon is characterised by an immense and profound corpus of synonyms and antonyms which contribute to the generation of diverse, vivid, effective possibilities of lexical choice and ample purely natural means of expression. Exploiting semantic relations as part of language processing might directly contribute at moulding students grounding and empowering their ability to use language at its depth. Teaching synonyms and antonyms is one of the most evident challenges foreign language teachers and learners can face. Exploring new ways and investigating novel perspectives through more upgraded teaching strategies and techniques, would help learners and teachers succeed in this process.

Bibliography

Flanigan, K. (2015) *Building a better vocabulary*. The Great courses Corporate Headquarters USA

Lipka, L. (1992) *An outline of English lexicology.* Max Neimeyer Verlag Tubingen

Gairns, R.& Redman, S. (1998) *Working with words.* Cambridge University Press

Lyons, J. (1995) *Language and Linguistics*. Cambridge University Press

Thornbury, S. (2002) *How to teach vocabulary.* Pearson Educated Limited

Jackson, H. (2002) *Lexicography An introduction.* Taylor& Francis Routledge

Chambers Pocket Thesarus (1992) Chambers Harrap Publishers

Oxford Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms (2007) Oxford University Press

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006) Oxford University Press