THE ROLE OF SEMANTIC CHANGE IN DISCOURSE AND SPEECH ACTS

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Semantic change functions as a mechanism of dynamic equilibrium within the semantic system of language. The transformation of meanings of linguistic units in relation to time, social environment and communicative purposes plays a significant role not only at the lexical level but also in the structuring of discourse and speech acts. This process reflects not so much the static nature of language as its functional mechanisms, namely flexible semantic adaptation within the sphere of speech and communication. At the same time, semantic change is closely connected with the cognitive experience and cultural memory of language users, facilitating the emergence of new meanings and the restructuring of existing semantic frameworks. Thus, semantic transformations constitute one of the key factors ensuring linguistic development and continuously expanding its communicative potential.
Keywords: *semantic change, discourse, speech act, semantics, pragmatics, context, stylistic transformation.*

РОЛЬ СЕМАНТИЧНИХ ЗМІН У ДИСКУРСІ ТА МОВЛЕННЄВИХ АКТАХ

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Семантичні зміни функціонують як механізм динамічної рівноваги в семантичній системі мови. Зміна значень мовних одиниць у контексті часу, соціального середовища та комунікативних цілей відіграє важливу роль не лише на лексичному рівні, а й у структурі дискурсу та мовленнєвих актів. Цей процес відображає не стільки статичний характер мови, скільки її функціональні механізми, зокрема гнучку семантичну адаптацію у сфері мовлення та комунікації. Водночас семантичні зміни тісно пов'язані з когнітивним досвідом і культурною пам'яттю носіїв мови, зумовлюючи виникнення нових значень і переосмислення наявних семантичних рамок. Таким чином, семантичні трансформації є одним із ключових чинників розвитку мови та постійно розширюють її комунікативний потенціал.
Ключові слова: *семантичні зміни, дискурс, мовленнєвий акт, семантика, прагматика, контекст, стилістична трансформація.*

Research Methods. The study employs discursive–pragmatic analysis**,** speech act theory and contextual–semantic interpretation methods in order to identify the manifestations of semantic change at the levels of discourse and speech acts. In addition, a stylistic and intergeneric comparative method is applied to literary and journalistic texts, which makes it possible to reveal the functional characteristics of semantic transformations.

Introduction. In modern linguistics, the concept of semantic change is studied not only as a historical-semantic phenomenon but also as one of the key components of discourse analysis and speech act theory. Semantic transformations arise under the influence of communicative intentions, social relations, and situational context. From this perspective, each speech act functions as a concrete manifestation of the process of meaning creation and transformation.

Semantic change in discourse is characterized by multidimensional semantic mobility: on the one hand, linguistic units acquire meaning in accordance with context; on the other hand, meaning is transformed in line with the mutual intentions of the participants in communication (Breal, 2007). Speech act theory provides an important theoretical basis for explaining this process, since changes in meaning are determined not only by the structural features of language but also by the speaker's intention and the listener's interpretation. As noted, *"just as parts of a text are connected to one another through content, the components and elements of discourse are also interconnected. In the absence of such connections, discourse gives the impression of a mere collection of words, expressions, and sentences and fails to meet the requirements of the definition attributed to discourse"* (Isgandarova, 2013: 4).

At the intersection of semantics and pragmatics, semantic change functions as a fundamental mechanism ensuring the dynamism of discourse. In particular contextual variability and the performative nature of speech acts lead to the continuous reconstruction of meaning. Thus, meaning in discourse is not static but represents a construct that is formed through inter-subjective interaction and remains open to transformation.

In traditional semasiology, semantic change was primarily evaluated as a historical-semantic phenomenon. In the nineteenth century, M. Bréal, in his work *Essai de Sémantique*, characterized semantic change as *"a natural process occurring in the evaluation of words under the influence of psychological and social factors"* (Faulkner, 2003). Subsequent studies have linked this phenomenon not only to the historical evolution of lexical meaning but also to the acquisition of new semantic values within acts of communication.

From the twentieth century onward, the study of semantic change has shifted from a purely semantic approach toward pragmatic and discursive perspectives. At this stage, meaning is interpreted not as a static category but as a processual phenomenon formed and transformed within communicative contexts. This shift has led to an understanding of language not merely as a structural system but also as a process of interaction and meaning-making. As observed, *"in dialogic speech, the idea expressed by one interlocutor is perceived by the other. Unlike monologic speech, dialogic interaction does not involve prior preparation; therefore, the participants are more active in the communicative process"* (Abdullayev, 2013: 102).

The concept of discourse represents a multilevel communicative unit that encompasses not only the structural but also the social and psychological dimensions of language. The process of meaning formation in discourse, unlike stable semantic relations at the system level of language, is determined by situational, interactive, and contextual factors (Traugott, Dasher, 2002). For this reason, semantic change functions as a natural attribute of discourse, since each discourse creates new semantic relations and interpretative possibilities within its specific context. Semantic change is considered a key mechanism that ensures the dynamic semantic balance of discourse. As the topic, genre, ideological framework and social participants of discourse change, its semantic structure also undergoes transformation.

Semantic change in discourse may manifest itself at both micro and macro levels. At the micro level, such change is observed at the level of individual sentences or expressions; for instance, alterations in syntactic structure or intonation may result in different meanings. At the macro level, the semantic orientation of an entire discourse shifts, which is often associated with ideological, social, or cultural transformations reflected in language (Evans, 2015).

Within the structure of speech acts, semantic change emerges as a result of the interaction between illocutionary intention, perlocutionary effect and locutionary expression. Each speech act carries a semantic tension among these three components and semantic change is formed as an interpretative outcome of this tension.

When a discrepancy arises between the speaker's intention and the literal meaning of an utterance, the speech act acquires a new meaning. In such cases semantic change occurs through interpretation at the illocutionary rather than the literal level. The purpose of a speech act is not merely to convey information but also to evoke a particular psychological or social

response in the listener. Thus, semantic change arises from the interaction between the speaker's intention and the listener's reaction. The perlocutionary effect may alter the emotional, social or ideological value of the speaker's words. Consequently, it is not the semantic value of the utterance itself but its communicative outcome that plays a decisive role.

One of the principal mechanisms of semantic change in speech acts is the blurring of boundaries between conventional and non-conventional meaning. Another important mechanism is inference, that is, the process by which the listener reconstructs the speaker's intention based on contextual cues. As a result of inference, meaning is derived not solely from the linguistic unit itself but also from the logic of the situation. In this process, meaning ceases to be a static entity and is instead "calculated" within context.

M. Bakhtin's concept of polyphony elucidates the social foundations of semantic change in speech acts (Bakhtin, 1963). A speaker's utterance often represents a synthesis of multiple voices social roles, ideological positions and emotional tones. Therefore, meaning in a speech act does not originate from a single source but emerges from multivoicedness. This reflects the social functionality of language and the multilayered nature of speech.

Semantic change is not merely a linguistic phenomenon occurring at the lexical or syntactic level; it also constitutes an aesthetic and communicative mechanism that plays a crucial role in the formation of style and genre. The emergence of semantic transitions between artistic and functional styles is directly related to this transformative property. From this perspective, semantic change serves both aesthetic purposes and the delineation of genre-specific semantic boundaries.

At the stylistic level, semantic change manifests itself in various forms, including metaphorical, metonymic, ironic and euphemistic transformations. These mechanisms function not only in the artistic—aesthetic domain but also in the communicative—functional dimension of speech. For example, while scientific style prioritizes semantic precision and objectivity, publicistic and literary styles enhance expressive power through semantic flexibility and multilayeredness. From a genre perspective, semantic change affects the structural and ideological coherence of texts. Each genre whether a novel, an essay or a publicistic speech possesses its own semantic code. This code establishes a semantic framework aligned with the genre's communicative purpose. However, semantic transformations occurring within this framework shape the genre's internal development mechanism.

In literary genres, meaning often changes through subjective interpretation, emotional tension, and connotative loading. In scientific genres semantic change results from terminological precision, conceptual expansion and interdisciplinary interaction. In both cases, the aim is not merely to transmit information but to express values and attitudes.

The realization of semantic change at stylistic and genre levels functions as one of the principal mechanisms enabling language to adapt to cultural context. Transformations within stylistic systems clearly demonstrate how social values, ideological orientations, and aesthetic preferences permeate language, thereby transforming it from a mere means of communication into a repository of cultural memory. Intergeneric transitions and stylistic variation allow semantic units to acquire different meanings in new contexts, expanding and enriching the expressive potential of language. In this respect semantic transformation emerges as a dynamic form of cultural self-expression within language and confirms its intrinsic connection to historical and cultural development.

The manifestations of semantic change at stylistic and genre levels can be observed not only at the theoretical level but also in concrete literary and discursive texts. In the examples below, various forms of this process metaphorical, ironic, pragmatic and discursive transformations are evident. These examples allow us to trace how semantic change operates from the perspective of speech acts and contextual interpretation. In classical poetic texts, semantic change is particularly evident at emotional and socio-functional levels of speech. Especially in poetic discourse, the boundaries of word meaning expand, and expressions begin to carry both aesthetic and communicative intentions.

"Ey əzizim, gəlibən şur ilə göftarə özün,

Eylədin xəlqi Züleyxa rüxi-dildarə özün" (Shirvani, 2005: 45)

Here, the expression *"şur ilə göftar"* does not merely denote passionate speech but also serves as an indicator of discursive manipulation. From a speech act perspective, a pragmatic shift is present that alters the speaker's communicative intention.

"When someone spoke of a headache, Mirza Asgar would immediately join in: *'My head never stops aching'... When he wrote the word 'flu,' he would cover his mouth with a handkerchief..."* (Mir Jalal, 2005: 120)

In this example, ironic discourse produces a hyperbolic semantic expansion. Expressions such as *"headache"* and *"flu"* do not merely denote physical conditions but represent social-psychological fear and illness phobia.

From a speech act perspective, this functions as a mechanism of self-defense and social distancing.

"As he squeezed my hand while leaving, he regretted that the conversation had been left unfinished..." (Mir Jalal, 2005: 16)

Here, the notion of an *"unfinished conversation"* does not indicate a simple communicative interruption but symbolizes moral misunderstanding and social distance. From a speech act perspective, this reflects the failure of the illocutionary goal of dialogue realization.

"At that time, her mother could no longer leave her room, and the household was run by her thin aunt. Under such circumstances, Minnie's wearing bright, light-styled dresses like a young girl and spending her days idly seemed utterly unrealistic... In the evenings, she went to the cinema and then wandered alone through the city center. Now, as she passed by the long rows of shop windows... no one looked back at her anymore" (Faulkner, 2003: 33).

In this passage Faulkner constructs semantic change at both social and psychological discourse levels. Expressions such as *"wearing bright dresses"* and *"passing by shop windows"* initially function as neutral descriptions of a woman's behavior; however, within the given context, they transform into symbols of emptiness and loneliness. Thus, semantic change is realized through pragmatic intention by expressing social circumstances and moral isolation.

Results and Discussion. Semantic change in discourse reflects not static semantic relations but a dynamic meaning-making process shaped by context, social relations, and communicative intentions.

In speech acts, semantic transformation arises from the interaction between locutionary expression, illocutionary intention, and perlocutionary effect.

At the discourse level, semantic change is observed at both micro (utterance, sentence) and macro (ideological, generic, and thematic) levels, thereby determining the semantic orientation of the text.

At stylistic and genre levels, semantic transformations expand the aesthetic and expressive potential of language, particularly through metaphorical, ironic, and pragmatic shifts that generate new meanings.

Cultural and social context functions as one of the principal conditions of semantic change and directly influences the interpretation of linguistic units.

Conclusion. Semantic change constitutes a fundamental mechanism that ensures the communicative and social dynamism of language. In discourse, this process is shaped by context, social relations, and ideological frame-

works, while in speech acts it is realized through the interaction between the speaker's intention and the listener's interpretation. At stylistic and genre levels, semantic transformation expands the aesthetic, expressive, and functional capacities of language. Thus, semantic change does not demonstrate the stability of meaning but rather reveals its variable, adaptive, and multilayered nature. From this perspective, semantic transformations serve as a bridge between the historical development of language and contemporary communicative needs. At the same time, semantic change exposes the interaction between individual language use and collective linguistic norms, confirming language as a living social phenomenon. Ultimately, semantic transformations ensure the continuous renewal of the cognitive, cultural, and pragmatic potential of language.

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