



Semantic Changes Analysis in Selected Political Magazines

Sally Abdulameer Mahdi, MA

Sally.a@albayan.edu.iq

College of Education, Al-Bayan University, Baghdad, Iraq

Abstract

This study discovers semantic change as manifested in selected texts from the American political magazine *The Progressive*. It situates semantic change within the broader framework of language change, emphasizing its gradual and universal nature, as well as its dependence on both linguistic and extralinguistic factors. Adopting a qualitative analytical approach based on Miles and Huberman (1994), the study examines eight political texts to identify patterns of meaning change. The analysis reveals the presence of several types of semantic change, including metaphor, metonymy, litotes, elevation, broadening, narrowing, and semantic shift. The findings demonstrate that word meaning is dynamic rather than fixed and is shaped by contextual and situational use, particularly within political discourse.

Keywords : Semantic Changes Analysis

تحليل التغيرات الدلالية في مجلات سياسية مختارة

م.م. سالي عبدالامير مهدي

Sally.a@albayan.edu.iq

كلية التربية، جامعة البيان، بغداد، العراق

المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في ظاهرة التغير الدلالي كما تتجلى في نصوص مختارة من المجلة السياسية الأمريكية *The Progressive*. وتضع الدراسة التغير الدلالي ضمن الإطار الأوسع للتغير اللغوي، مؤكدةً طبيعته التدريجية والشمولية، واعتماده على عوامل لغوية وخارج لغوية على حدٍ سواء. وتعتمد الدراسة المنهج التحليلي النوعي استناداً إلى نموذج مايلز وهوبرمان (1994)، حيث تقوم بتحليل ثمانية نصوص سياسية بهدف الكشف عن أنماط تحوّل المعنى. وتُظهر نتائج التحليل وجود عدة أنواع من التغير الدلالي، من بينها الاستعارة، والمجاز المرسل، والتقليل (Litotes)، والارتقاء الدلالي، والتوسيع الدلالي، والتضييق الدلالي، والتحوّل الدلالي. وتبيّن النتائج أن معنى الكلمة ليس ثابتاً، بل ديناميكي ومتغير، ويتشكّل تبعاً للسياق الاستعمالي والظروف الموقفية، ولا سيما في الخطاب السياسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل التغيرات الدلالية

Introduction

This paper concerned itself with identifying and analyzing various types of semantic changes in the American political magazine, particularly 'The Progressive' magazine. The paper provides an overview of language change in general and semantic change in particular. Moreover, the methodological approach that is adopted in this paper is the 'Qualitative Analysis' by Miles and Huberman (1994). Finally, the paper ends by presenting the results obtained from the data analysis.



The Notion of Semantics

Semantics constitutes a subdivision of linguistics. It is typically characterised as the examination of the significance of words, phrases, and sentences. Crystal (1991) notes that semantics significantly focuses on the examination of the semantic features of natural languages rather than logical languages. He elucidates that the historical trajectory of inquiry, originating with Plato and Aristotle, has recently encompassed philosophers and logicians such as Charles Price, Rudolf Carnap, and Alfred Tarski. Wales (1998) notes that the term "semantics" derives from the Greek root "sema" (sign) and has been significantly shaped by philosophy and logic throughout its history. It encompasses several categories, including lexical semantics, phrase semantics, narrative semantics, and literary semantics.

Throughout its history, semantics witnessed an obvious development. Traditionally, the field of semantics was concerned with the study of the meaning of words (lexical semantics). James and Hartmann (1998) demonstrate that in recent times, the branch of semantics has expanded to encompass other levels of linguistic structure, including the meaning of sentences (syntax) and texts (discourse analysis). They assert that there are several models and approaches of semantics, from (semantic field theory to compositional analysis and prototype semantics).

Lobner (2013) classifies the branch of semantics consistent with the principle of compositionality in the following sub-disciplines:

1. Lexical semantics: It focuses on the expression meanings stored in the mental lexicon, like (door, pen, tree).
2. The semantics of regular word production pertains to the meanings that words signify, generated by established norms, such as (carp food, joggable).
3. The semantics of grammatical forms pertains to the examination of the meaning contributed by grammatical structures.
4. Compositional semantics for sentences: it seeks rules of interpretation able to capture how the meanings of individual parts of a complex expression determine the meaning they take on when in combination with other meanings.

Language Change: An Overview

One of the subjects of historical linguistics is the term 'language change'. Akmajian (2001) depicts language change as one of the subfields of linguistics that studies language in its historical stages and developments. Obviously, the term diachronic linguistics is used instead of historical linguistics. Diachronic linguistics aims to elucidate the evolution of languages across temporal dimensions. The term 'Diachronic' is often used in contrast to synchronic. Synchronic usually means the study of a language (or languages) at a single point in time.



It is essential to identify the origin of linguistic change in general. Fasold (2006) posits that all languages undergo transformation in accordance with the contexts and requirements of speech groups. He illustrates that languages develop through interaction with other languages and their corresponding civilisations. Consequently, linguistic evolution exposes the political, social, and military dimensions of a speech group. Significantly, numerous factors contribute to language change:

1- Languages evolve due to human usage rather than mechanical influence. It is noteworthy that humans possess shared physiological and cognitive traits. All individuals within a certain speech community exhibit variations in their understanding and utilisation of the common language.

2-Speakers from various social classes, geographies, and generations exhibit dialect variation, while all speakers demonstrate register variation by utilising language differently in diverse contexts.

3-Children inherently tend to adopt informal linguistic traits favoured by their parents over formal alternatives, resulting in gradual shifts towards more informality in language over generations.

4- Language change is not consistent; a language may exhibit minor alterations across numerous generations and thereafter experience significant transformations within a brief span of a few lifetimes. Language change may be driven by physiological, cognitive, and social factors, with the majority of such change resulting from regulation and interaction between languages. Language change evidently encompasses various domains of linguistics, including phonetics, morphology, and semantic evolution.

Semantic Change

At the start, language is a constant flux of change. Fromkin (2007, p. 277) asserts that the language of this country is perpetually in flux, rendering the Struldbruggs of one era incapable of comprehending those of another; after two centuries, they are unable to engage in conversation (beyond a few general terms) with their mortal neighbours, thus experiencing the disadvantage of existing as foreigners in their own homeland.

Bloomfield (1933) defined semantic change as any alteration in the meanings of words throughout a period. Arifin (2021) defined semantic change as the alteration in a word's meaning, either expanding or contracting from its initial connotation.

Palmer (1981) notes that the study of the change of meaning in time is usually termed 'historical semantics'; the first use of the term 'semantics' was in the development



and change of meaning. Various kinds of change occur in the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences, such as narrowing, widening, metaphor, hyperbole, litotes, meaning shift, and Elevation.

Types of Semantic Change

1-Widening:

Fromkin (2007) defines widening as the procedure by which a word's meaning expands to encompass its original significance and additional connotations, exemplified by:

-Dogge refers to a specific breed of dog, although the term has been expanded to include all members of the Canis family.

-Holiday = It was first intended as a day of religious importance, derived from 'holy day'. Currently, the term refers to any day on which one can capture an image with a camera, including a mobile phone.

-Google: It means using the google search engine on the internet, which will be broadened in meaning to use a search engine on the internet.

-Footage signifies a particular length of film or videotape; nevertheless, it presently refers to any excerpt from an electronic visual medium, including DVDs.

Notably, many recent words are regarded as broadenings like (computer, cookie, mouse, and bundle).

2-Narrowing:

Fromkin (2007) characterises 'narrowing' as a specific form of semantic change whereby a word's meaning diminishes in scope over time, exemplified by: The term 'davenport' originally referred to a small writing desk, not a sofa. Currently, in American English, its definition has become restricted to sofa only.

-The expression "bound" is generally applied to "dog." Currently, the term "bound" refers to a certain breed of dog used for hunting purposes.

-Deer ones meant animal.

-Meat ones meant food.

3-Metaphor:

Simpson (2004) defines 'metaphor' as a progression of mapping between two distinct conceptual worlds. It means a comparison between two unlike things; it represents a device of asserting that two things are identical in comparison rather than just similar:



The term 'chill,' once denoting a decrease in temperature, now conveys a directive to 'relax.' The correlation between the senses lies in the decrease of temperature and the temperament of an irascible individual.

4-Metonymy:

Yule (2010) defines 'metonymy' as a relationship between words based on a close affinity in everyday experience. The intimate linkage is contingent upon a container-contents relationship (bottle-water, can-juice), a whole-part relationship (car-wheels, house-roof), or a representative-symbol tie (king-crown, president-White House). Consequently, employing one of these terms to denote the other exemplifies metonymy.

5-Hyperbole and Litotes:

Leech (1983) indicates that the term Hyperbole signifies 'overstatement' while Litotes denotes 'understatement'. The former is characterised as a speaker's portrayal that exceeds what is justified by the given circumstances. The latter denotes the converse of this:

- "*It made my blood boil*" (Hyperbole).

- "*I wasn't born yesterday*" (Litotes).

6-Meaning Shift:

Fromkin (2007) reveals that the term 'meaning shifts' refers to one of the prominent types of semantic change. In this type, the lexical term may experience a semantic shift, for instance:

-The word "night" originally denoted "youth" but transitioned to signify "mounted man-at-arms."

-The term "Lust" often signifies "pleasure" without of negative implications.

-The term "silly" originally denoted "happy" in Old English. During the Middle English period, it indicated (naive), and only in Modern English does it signify (foolish).

7-Elevation:

Alvares (n.d.) suggests that when a particular word acquires certain pleasant connotations that it did not have before, it could be said that the meaning of this word is elevated. In other words, this type of semantic change means shifting/changing in the sense of a word towards a positive value:

- "*Angel = Messenger.*"



-*"Knight = boy"*

-*"Nice = Ignorant-foolish-delightful-pleasant."*

-*"Marshal = a keeper of horses, a high-ranking army officer."*

-*"Fond = foolish-affectionate."*

-*"Awesome = terrible-terrific."*

-Robins (1965) theory: Semantic Changes

Robins (1965) demonstrates that, over time, some words alter in their properties concerning the situations they denote or in the manner of their reference. He contends that the significance of interconnected words inside a language, pertaining to various semantic roles, has been recognised as a crucial element in discerning and analysing the meanings of numerous words across languages. Thus, the meanings of certain terms may be affected by alterations in the composition and meanings of the relevant field, within the language overall, or in specific contexts. The modifications are extensive and significant, and can be encapsulated in the following points:

- 1- Certain words develop varying connotations over time, influencing their total contextual significance. Such modifications may be associated with sociocultural changes. For instance, the comparison of the term 'enthusiasm' as delineated in Dr. Johnson's English Dictionary from the 19th century with its definition in the Oxford English Dictionary.
- 2- Some terms have a reduced scope of contextual usage. For instance, the phrase 'flesh' in the Authorised Version of the Bible signifies nutrition in a general context. Recently, the term 'meat' has been utilised to denote precisely butcher's meat or flesh food, as it persists in the established phrase meat and drink. This semantic survival resembles the persistence of certain archaic vocabulary forms in specific situations that are no longer common in contemporary English.
- 3- The term 'gobbet' is simply employed to signify 'piece', as in: a piece of meat, a piece of bread. Recently, the term "gobbet" has been utilised solely to denote brief excerpts in books designated for reference in examination papers. Some terms alter their primary reference. The Latin term /testa/, signifying tile or skull, came to refer to the head in a more expansive sense.
- 4- Some words expand the scope of their meanings. In Middle English, the term bird /bird/, also spelt /bird/, denotes a young bird. In contemporary English, the term "bird" is employed to denote all avian species, irrespective of age.



5-Certain proper names of individuals associated with specific products or behaviours expand their significance. For example, the terms "Rolls" and "Royce," referring to two automobile manufacturers, have combined to form the term "Rolls-Royce," which designates a certain type of car.

6-Certain words expand their grammatical categories, such as "boycott," which functions as both a noun and a verb, originating from the name of Captain Boycott, a 19th-century Irish land agent. Semantic broadening is clearly evident in metaphorical applications, when a specific word is utilised in several contexts and refers to diverse attributes due to perceived similarities in meaning.

The term 'jet,' in addition to denoting a 'forcibly expelled stream of liquid or gas,' has also been adopted to refer to a jet propulsion system in aeroplanes. Furthermore, the term 'nuclear' now denotes 'pertaining to explosions resulting from the fission of specific chemical atoms, and to weaponry derived from such processes'.

The Description of the Data Collection and Methodology

The data in this research consists of sentences. The sentences generated by the American political publication 'The Progressive' exhibit semantic alterations. The context of the data pertains to the quotation. The paper depends on a qualitative approach for the investigation of various types of semantic changes in the text. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) characterise qualitative research as a 'multi-method' technique that necessitates an interpretative and naturalistic perspective on its subject matter. This research necessitates the gathering of diverse empirical resources, including personal experiences, life narratives, interviews, case studies, historical documents, observational data, interactional records, and visual texts. Miles and Huberman (1994), in their methodology of 'qualitative data,' present diverse methods for observing, analysing, comparing, contrasting, and interpreting numerous significant patterns or themes. They suggest three modern approaches for data analysis: data reduction, data visualisation, and conclusion formulation/validation.

Data reduction is the process of selecting, concentrating, simplifying, abstracting, and changing data present in actual transcriptions. Data display constitutes structured information, encompassing the conclusion. The conclusion is to articulate a temporal outcome of the study. The present paper depends on Data Reduction. In qualitative analysis, the researcher chooses which data are to be singled out for description.

In accordance with the principles of selection. This typically entails a synthesis of deductive and inductive analysis. Although preliminary classifications are



influenced by research enquiries, the qualitative researcher must maintain receptivity to deriving novel interpretations from the given data.

The data reduction procedure concentrates on synthesising the insights provided by various responder groups regarding the methods employed to disseminate knowledge across faculty members involved in the study and those who were not. How do the statements of participating faculty contrast with those of nonparticipating faculty and the department chair about knowledge exchange and the adoption of new practices? In delineating these differences and similarities, it is crucial to avoid "flattening" or oversimplifying the data to the extent that they resemble closed-ended survey replies. The inclination to handle qualitative data in this fashion is prevalent among analysts educated in quantitative methodologies.

The outcome renders qualitative analysis akin to diluted survey research with an insignificant sample size. This kind of qualitative analysis unjustly diminishes the data's richness, so it accidentally compromises one of the qualitative approach's most significant advantages.

Addressing the inquiry regarding knowledge sharing qualitatively necessitates transcending a mere enumeration of knowledge-sharing activities to also explore respondents' evaluations of the relative efficacy of these activities, along with their justifications for perceiving certain activities as more effective than others.

Data Analysis

Text (1)

"The year 2021 has been one of worker anger boiling over. From "Striketober" to "The Great Resignation," Sarah Jaffe covers the many ways workers have been taking a stand for themselves in the December 2021/January 2022 issue of the magazine."

In the text above, the author explains the highest degree of workers' anger. Obviously, the phrase (worker anger boiling over) can be described as an exaggerated phrase because it contains the word (boiling). Literally, based on the Oxford learner dictionary, the word 'boil' (with reference to a liquid, a kettle, a pan, food, and other containers). Obviously, in the text above, the meaning of the word (boil) is associated with human anger to convey the exaggerated sense. The author conveys the type of semantic change, which is termed (Hyperbole) to express a particular idea.

Text (2)



*"Prior to the November 2020 election, Trump lied, 'The only way we're going to lose this election is if the election is rigged.' Now this is true the other way around: The only way Trump and his party can win is through **massive fraud**," writes editor Bill Lueders."*

The author aims to convey President Donald Trump's perspective on an election. He asserted that the sole method of securing an election victory is through extensive fraud. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'fraud' refers to a form of dishonesty intended to secure an advantage, typically financial, through improper methods (a tort or crime). The author illustrates a form of semantic transformation known as 'Litotes' by employing a negative phrase to express a positive concept.

Text (3)

"Rosa's Law removed dehumanizing language from disability care facilities, but it didn't remove the real problem: oppressive housing that isolates disabled people from the general community."

At the semantic level, the author in the text above explains the idea that (Rosa's Law) protects disability care facilities by removing dehumanizing language. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word 'Ross' means a flower with a sweet smell that grows on a bush with thorns. Obviously, the meaning of the word 'Rosa' expanded and developed in its meaning. In the above text. Rosa's Law is composed of the person's name (Rose) plus the noun (law). The author shows a type of semantic change by using a person's name (Rose) to designate the name of the law.

Text (4)

*"A new campaign, **Housing Not Handcuffs**, is targeting laws that criminalize activities engaged in by people experiencing homelessness and encouraging an increase in affordable housing."*

In the text above, the author uses a metaphorical expression to convey a particular idea to the readers. The expression 'Housing Not Handcuffs' is the title for a campaign held by people to increase affordable housing. Literally, based on the Oxford English Dictionary, the word 'Handcuffs' means (a pair of metal rings joined by a chain, used for holding a prisoner together). The author in this text resembles the meaning of the word 'Handcuffs' with the meaning of 'Housing'. He conveys one type of semantic change, which is termed 'Metaphor'.

Text (5)

"Smoking Gun: The GOP's Pro-COVID-19 Agenda"



Republican lawmakers in at least twenty-six states, driven by manufactured outrage over mask mandates, vaccination requirements, and shutdowns, have passed laws to weaken the authority, possibly permanently, of state and local officials to protect public health."

The article indicates the re-election of legislators in numerous states, motivated by contrived indignation regarding mask mandates. The term 'mask' currently encompasses a broad spectrum of interpretations. The Oxford English Dictionary defines this word as having multiple meanings, including:

- A. A facial covering employed either as a disguise or for entertainment or intimidation purposes.
- B. A mask designed to cover the mouth and nose to reduce the spread of infectious agents or to prevent the inhalation of pollutants and other harmful chemicals.
- C. A comprehensive facial protective shield utilised in fencing, ice hockey, and various other sports.
- D. A representation of an individual's visage fashioned or carved in clay.
- E. A person's visage is perceived as having assumed a specific expression.

The author in the text above shows one type of semantic change, which is termed 'widening' by using the word (mask) with the noun (mandates).

Text (6)

"Though often called a 'crisis,' what's happening at the U.S.-Mexico border can be more accurately described as an ongoing tragedy, a national shame, and a violation of human rights. That's how history will remember it, at least."

In the text above, the author describes what happens at the U.S.-Mexico border as a 'crisis' or 'tragedy'. Literally, the meaning of the word 'crisis' in Latin and Greek is (distinguish, choose, decide). Nowadays, the meaning of the word 'crisis' is narrowed. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, this word means (the time of danger or difficulty). The author in this text expresses one type of semantic change, which is termed (narrowing).

Text (7)

"Paul Buhle and the Rise of Socialist Comics By Paul Von Blum CD"

*"Paul Buhle has been at the forefront of telling **the lost stories** of U.S. radicalism—in comic book form—for nearly two decades. Now he's having an impact on the rise of socialist comics."*

In the text above, the author describes U.S. radicalism as the 'lost stories' and explains them in a comic book. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the meaning of the word 'lost' is (to fail to keep or hold something).



In this text, the word 'lost' is elevated in its meaning. In other words, it becomes more negative, and the authors use it when they want to describe something bad or negative. Hence, the text above comprises one type of semantic change, which is termed 'Elevation'.

Text (8)

"Though President Joe Biden promised a new era of U.S. diplomacy, his foreign policy team is now widely acknowledged to have brought relations with Russia and China to an all-time low."

In the text above, the author conveys the thoughts of President Joe Biden concerning the new area of U.S diplomacy. The author uses the word 'promise' to express a positive idea. Literally, the origin of the word 'promise' can be described as follows:

Late Middle English *promis(se)* derives from Mediaeval Latin *prōmissa*, which is the noun form of the neuter past participle *prōmissum* of the Latin verb *prōmittere*, meaning to promise, literally translating to send forth, composed of *prō-* (forth) and *mittere* (to send).

Recently, the meaning of the word 'promise' in the Oxford English Dictionary is (to keep or do something). In the text above, the word 'promise' is elevated in its meaning and becomes more positive; therefore, the author selects it to describe something good. Hence, the text contains one type of semantic change, which is termed 'Elevation'.

Results of the Analysis

The following points are obvious results that are obtained from the data collection and analysis:

1-The American Political Magazine under analysis reveals several kinds of semantic changes. Depending on Miles and Huberman's (1994) method of 'Qualitative Analysis', the data is analyzed through data reduction. The authors adopt these semantic changes as a linguistic choice to convey various meanings and show the flexibility of language over time.

2-The qualitative analysis reveals that the political texts comprise many types of semantic changes. The authors employ the metaphorical meaning, how the meanings of words shift over time, the narrowing of words into a specific meaning, the broadening of words into more than one meaning within a text, the hyperbolic expressions or words that convey an exaggerated meaning in different texts, and the elevation of words into a negative or positive meaning.



3-By applying Miles and Huberman's (1994) method of 'qualitative analysis', the researcher selects some particular words and focuses on the change of meaning in these words in the old and new. More obviously, the Oxford English Dictionary helps to show the meaning of these words nowadays and how they are used throughout political texts.

Conclusion

Semantic change is a common phenomenon in all languages. It is a universal linguistic phenomenon; it happens gradually over time for different reasons, which are either linguistic or extra-linguistic. This universal feature does not only concern words, but there are many changes in linguistics, such as morphological, sound, and grammatical changes. It could be said that the meaning of a word is not constant or stable; instead, it changes throughout time to fit the context or the situation in which it is used. The paper argued for different types of semantic changes, such as litotes, Metonymy, Metaphor, Elevation, Broadening, Narrowing, and semantic shift. It examined the variability of (8) English political texts; all these texts exhibit one type of change.

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Online Resources

<https://www.shareyouessays.com/knowledge/9-most-important-types-of-semantic-changes-in-english/112616>