

A brief survey on syntactical synonymy

Aida Gumerovna Sadykova and Aigul Raisovna Gilmutdinova

Kazan Federal University, Kremlevskaya str., 18, Kazan, 420008, Russian Federation

Abstract. The issues of grammatical synonymy in general and syntactical synonymy specifically are timely in modern linguistics; they draw attention of many scientists. Grammatical studies of the past decade take a growing interest in the problem of synonymy. It should be noted that in linguistic literature the term ‘synonymy’ is increasingly frequently used in relation to different language elements: sounds, word forms, morphemes, syntactical constructions. The phenomenon of synonymy is multifold, it can be found in all aspects of the language, is closely related to problems of speech culture, stylistics, etc. Synonymy with ever increasing frequency is examined not only in vocabulary but also in syntax, which is explained by the possibilities provided by the studies of syntactical synonymy for onomasiological description of the language, transformational analysis. The aim of our study is to observe briefly approaches of different linguists to define ‘syntactical synonymy’ and to find out main criteria of synonymy.

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Introduction

The study of syntactical synonymy as a contradictory mechanism of sameness and otherness of the language system affords an opportunity of deep insight into the essence of this phenomenon reveals an isomorphic systematic and specific character, essence of linguistic phenomena.

Despite the growing interest in the issues of syntactical synonymy, there are still remaining a lot of underinvestigated problems and contradictions in this field. There is no consensus about the term ‘syntactical synonymy’, its criteria, distinction between syntactical synonymy and similar linguistic phenomena. Interlinguistic syntactical synonymy is also understudied, though we can find the interlinguistic study of syntactical synonymy in scientific research of Khantakova [1], Khairutdinova [2], Pelikhov [3].

Syntactical synonymy is a consistent feature of the grammatical system of a developed language, one of the most important sources of the wealth of the language. It is based on the dialectical unity of the commonness of content and the difference of forms of syntactical constructions.

Syntactical synonymy is a manifestation of linguistic variation of the language which is closely connected with extralinguistic (functional, pragmatic, stylistic, social) variation, which is called the problem of ‘choice’ in linguistics.

The main characteristics of synonyms – notional sameness and structural and functional otherness – let us distinguish them from adjacent linguistic phenomena – syntactical variants and doublets.

Synonymy is often studied within the scope of stylistics as an important source of linguistic variety, expressing or describing one and the same content by means of different linguistic forms. The choice of one or another synonymous syntactical construction is due to a communicative aim, an intention to attain it using the most appropriate linguistic means.

The ambiguity and specific character of syntactical synonymy consists in the fact that, unlike lexical synonymy, syntactical synonymy requires taking into account not only the semantic meaning of linguistic units but also such important characteristics as grammatical meaning, syntactical environment, belonging to a certain syntactical level, an ability to fulfill a certain syntactical function in a sentence, an ability to transform, positional peculiarities, etc.

While studying this phenomenon it is necessary to determine a set of universal characteristics integrating syntactical units in a synonymic row, and define semantic, structural grammatical, stylistic features of each member of a synonymic row.

Views on syntactical synonymy

The analysis of scientific works of linguists shows that the phenomenon ‘syntactical synonymy’ is understood in a broad sense with some scientists bringing together syntactical constructions on the basis of notional and functional similarity.

One of the first references of the term ‘grammatical synonyms’ was made in the research of O.Jespersen [4]. The author doesn’t give the definition of the term, the criteria of the synonymy

of syntactical constructions, but some of the given examples can be regarded as such.

We can also observe examples of parallel constructions which are the illustration of syntactical synonyms in the works of Sweet. He mentions the equivalence of subordinate clauses and participial groups fulfilling the same syntactical function. For example, "Seeing a crowd, I stopped. When I saw a crowd, I stopped" [5].

Curme studies synonymical constructions expressing the genitive (the son of the king- the king's son), temporal constructions (the day after I came – the day after my coming), conditional constructions (conditions being favourable – if conditions are favourable), causal constructions (tired and discouraged – since I was tired and discouraged) [6]. But the scientist looks at them from the point of view of the variety of ways of expressing various meanings.

German scientists of the 1920-1930s Trier [7], Porzig [8] without using the term 'synonym' discovered various linguistic means expressing the same idea. They introduced the term 'grammatical fields' which include numerous means chosen by the speaker depending on the estimation and perspective.

One of the representatives of Geneva linguistic school Karcevski [9] considers the issue of synonymy only in theory without distinguishing the planes of vocabulary and grammar, and morphology and syntax within grammar. According to Karcevski, every linguistic sign is both synonymous and homonymous. He claims that a linguistic sign is created by crossing synonymic and homonymous rows. The notions of homonymy and synonymy are not distinct; he terms homonymy as polysemy. The value of his research is in the aim to reveal the connection of synonymy and polysemy and the part of these phenomena in the system of the language.

The American structuralist Wells also offers an opinion about the omnitude of synonymy in the language. According to him, synonymy is based on the possibility to express one content by means of more than one linguistic phenomenon. He assumes that every sign in every language has at least one synonym. For example, the repetition of the sentence 'John went to town' can be the synonym of 'John went to town' [10].

In 1950-1960s representatives of transformational grammar, which recognized the existence of relations of equivalence between transforms, also took an interest in issues of syntactical synonymy. The linguists of this school tried to study syntactical synonyms on the basis of semantics.

The issue of syntactical synonymy was investigated in the transformational generative theory

of Chomsky [11]. Chomsky [12] studies the variety of syntactically bound surface structures each member of which is directly connected with an abstract underlying representation, has an identical internal structure with other members and is in transformational relations with them; he considers such structures to be synonymous. But such an approach takes into account only the relation of equivalence and disregards the connection of the language and reality, the language, context and activity.

According to Harris [13], most sentences which are transforms of each other have almost the same meaning, differing only in the external grammatical status. Though the scientist states that the semantic content remains invariant in transforms, he couldn't elicit the true basis of the invariant nature of the sentences.

A decade later one of the representatives of generative grammar Chafe notes that cases of absolute synonymy and absolute paraphrase are relatively rare in the language [14]. He thinks it necessary to distinguish a semantic structure and meaning. In accordance with his conception, a semantic structure is a theoretical construct which forms the basis of the explanation of apparent facts that belong to the category of meaning. Consequently, he considers the expedience of attempts to find integrated semantic structures underlying the row of surface structures dubious. Chafe raises a question about the independence of synonymy and paraphrase from the fact whether they ascend to one or different semantic structures. His research doesn't look into the referential aspect of synonymous syntactical units, the dependence of functioning of synonymous constructions on the tenor.

Adherents of interpretative semantics also made some attempts to withdraw from regarding synonymous units as equivalents and to determine the meaning of synonymous units on the basis of semantic peculiarities of surface structures. Katz defines synonymy as a relation of commonality by meaning [15], commonality being some general features in a sentence. He also distinguishes 'synonymy' and 'absolute synonymy'. Units with a general semantic interpretation are synonymous in meaning. Absolute synonymy supposes an identity of sets of semantic interpretations of units.

Katz's method of component analysis is of great value. But the linguist believed that semantics consists of two components: vocabulary, where meanings of word can be found, and a combinatorial component, which derives the meaning of a complex expression and, finally, the meaning of the whole sentence from the meaning of its constituent words

[16]. It is a mistaken opinion, because the sense is generated with the help of meanings and doesn't reduce neither to isolated meanings nor their whole. It is often criticized that Katz denied a necessity to take into consideration a situational context in semantic describing.

Such a diversity of opinions on the essence of syntactical synonyms testifies of the ambiguousness of this linguistic phenomenon.

Criteria of synonymy

One of the ambiguous issues in the theory of syntactical synonymy is the criteria of synonymy.

The study of various opinions of scientists let us sum up all the criteria of synonymy. Here belongs substitutability, commonality of syntactical meaning, commonality of lexical composition, homogeneity of syntactical relations, referring to various structures, modality, the frequency of use, a possibility to transform.

Constructions, which are correlated in lexical-syntactical and lexical-phraseological planes, composing a variable row in relation to a basic model that expresses a general typical meaning by minimal linguistic means are considered to be synonymous.

Substitutability is considered to be one of the most important objective characteristics of synonymy. But it should be noted that substitutability mustn't violate the main meaning of correlated constructions. Thus, a possibility of such substitutions is strictly limited. Besides, syntactical environment should be equal. While trying to substitute one synonymous unit by another we come across differentiating factors that make them inequivalent and a substitution impossible. Here belong a difference in expressing relations, a grammatical tradition, a communicative aim, expanding elements, a subjective orientation of thought of the author, etc.

Another criterion is an identity of notional meaning of structurally different models, it seems quite logical that structures with a different lexical composition can't be synonymous.

Every syntactical model has a certain grammatical meaning that shows its role and place in a sentence. For example, if we take constructions 'after finishing the task' and 'after he finished the task', it is obvious that both constructions express temporal grammatical meaning. Thus, an adequate grammatical meaning enables these structures to fulfill the same syntactical function in the structure of a sentence.

One grammatical meaning contains lots of shades, and every structure actualizes only one of them. As a result, various structures (constructions, clauses, sentences) express one grammatical

meaning. So, referring to various structures, being another criterion of syntactical synonymy, supposes not considerable quantitative differences in the structure of constructions, but the difference in the way of expressing one grammatical meaning.

An extra criterion can be a possibility to translate every synonymous construction of an original language by relevant synonymous models of a target language.

Despite many moments bringing together correlated constructions synonymous constructions differ from each other. Among the factors which distinguish the constructions are: 1) a more vivid expression of a syntactical meaning in one of the constructions; 2) a difference in the shade of meaning; 3) specificity, abstractness; 4) the frequency of use.

The above mentioned criteria enable us to include syntactical constructions into a synonymic row. A synonymic row is a certain subsystem of models which are united due to expressing the same syntactical relations by means of different grammatical constructions. It is an open, incomplete formation, capable of changing, expanding, reducing because of the changes in the language. A synonymic row originates from the description of the language in which linguistic units come out in their most important functions, manifesting syntagmatic characteristics.

Conclusion

The enrichment of the language with the help of synonyms is a continuous process. Being a means of social communication the language is constantly developing. It is constantly changing which is determined by the progressive advance of society, attendant extralinguistic factors and laws of the development of the language as a system, i.e. intralinguistic factors. The dynamic state of the language is caused by the formation, functioning and interaction of commonly used language units together with occasional [17]. Needs of human interaction, the development of society, the necessity to express complex relations between objects of current reality favor an ongoing updating of the language.

The principle of dialectical unity of the general and the particular, which reflects different aspects of one and the same phenomena and relations of objective reality, underlies the synonymy of linguistic units.

Synonymous syntactical units are elements of the grammatical system of the language, which are in relations of substitution. The relation of synonymous substitution in the grammatical system of the language is of great importance as it creates a bigger flexibility in the organization of speech and

affords an extra opportunity to express different shades of grammatical meanings.

Having analyzed the theory of syntactical synonymy we come to a conclusion that syntactical synonyms are models of syntactical constructions (phrases, clauses, sentences) which have an adequate grammatical meaning, an identical or similar notional meaning, express similar syntactical relations and can be replaceable in certain conditions of the context.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Sadykova, Kazan Federal University, Kremlevskaya str., 18, Kazan, 420008, Russian Federation.

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