

SEMANTIC ALTERNATION FROM ANIMAL TO HUMAN UNDER SEMANTIC FIELD PERSPECTIVES

Nguyen Van Thao¹, Tran Thi Huong Tra²

¹Faculty of Philology, Hanoi Pedagogical University 2, Vietnam

²K43 - Faculty of Philology, Hanoi Pedagogical University 2, Vietnam

¹Email: nguyenvanthao@hpu2.edu.vn

²Email: huongtra1319@gmail.com

Abstract:

Concerning linguistic aspects, especially the meanings of words have been deeply studied by linguists in recent years, which have achieved diversely lexicology-related results. However, determining the meanings of language units in general and words, in particular, is a long-term and complicated process. For this reason, theory-applied research still needs to be deeply continued. It can be admitted that traditional culture is deeply rooted in the subconscious of each ethnic group exposed in their language. As a result, linguistic research into the interrelation of cognition and culture is necessary and urgent in the world and Vietnam as well. The research results show the contextual changes in the meanings of words from animal to human concerning semantic fields. When semantic change takes place in a semantic field, the semantically changed words remain their originally semantic nuances, which form two socio-linguistic trends- the positive and negative. According to the primary data, the number of positive words showed only 2 cases while the words with negative meaning made up 44 cases. The majority of words tend to be transformed negatively. These stems were coined based on the Vietnamese's cognition about the animals. It is quite noteworthy that whenever Vietnamese people argue in informal contexts, they tend to employ animal-related words that verbally shape typically exclusive features in the Vietnamese language.

Keywords: Semantic field, semantic changes, animal, human.

A. Introduction

The meanings of words in particular and the semantic changes have been examined under various linguistic theories by various linguists. However, to determine the meanings of language units in general and words, in particular, is not simple for everyone. The studies on the semantic issues of languages have achieved outstanding results so far in linguistics. It can be admitted that traditional culture is deeply rooted in the subconscious of each ethnic group exposed through their language, adding that culture is only revealed through language. As a result, linguistic research into the

interrelation of cognition and culture is a necessary and urgent domain in socio-linguistics. As we know, the phenomenon of semantic change from one semantic field to another one is a universal concept in natural languages, which helps languages form a wide range of meanings based on the finitely natural sounds and thereby enrich the meanings of words. However, the research into a semantic alternation of a specific semantic field from one to another has remained inherent gaps to be bridged. In Vietnam, the studies on lexicology related to the semantic field have acquired certain achievements; however, there are no other researches into the semantic changes between the animal and human semantic fields. Each author has just focused on research into certain words which appear at the center of semantic fields. To meet the linguistic research demands, the semantic changes between the animal semantic field and the human semantic field will be further discussed in this article.

B. Literature review

1. Researches on the semantic field

The development of the semantic field theory originally started from the work of American anthropologists and German linguists in the early 20th century. These scholars were influenced by Humboldt, whose theory was related to the *inner speech-form of language*. This theory reflected the unique cognitive ability about the world of each ethnic group which was known as the premise for all semantic field theories. In addition to Humboldt's theory of the relationship between language and consciousness, the semantic field theory has been also based on the premise of Saussure's structuralism (Guo, Changhong, 2010, 188). In 1973, F. de Saussure once stated that "the value of any factor is determined by the other surrounding". He also used the example of a chessboard and chess pieces to persuade that no matter the material and the handle of the chess pieces, the key was its relation with other chess pieces in the chessboard. In other words, we must put a single chess piece into their strategically overall system. This idea was a decisive inspiration to formulate the semantic field theories. Thanks to this basic principle, a great number of researchers also had acquired the semantic field theory, such as Porzig, Stern, Trier, Jolles, Ohman, Matoré, Ullmann, Oskar, Buttler, Perchonock and Werner, Kleparski, Lehrer, etc, especially, Trier's semantic field theory opened a new chapter in the history of semantics (Grzegorz A. Kleparski, Angelina Rusinek, 2007, 189).

However, later Porzig and Ipsen, R. Hallig, and W. Von Warburg, P.M Roget had a different perspective on this theory.

Besides, some detailed studies on the semantic field should be mentioned such as R. Hallig and W. Von Warburg (Chau, 1998, 247), P.M. Roget (Chau, 1998, 246) and W.P. Zaleskij analyzed some verbs related to the *eye activity* in English (Chau, 1998). Moreover, Duchace studied the "conceptual field of *beauty* in modern French" (Chau, 1998, 248). Adrienne Lehrer (1985) studied the effect of the semantic field on the semantic change. Ricardo Mairal Usón (1990) in Spain studied the semantic field of *light and darkness* in the poem *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, and the study of Bert Peeters (1991). Since the 2000s, many international types of researches have been applied to the semantic field theory to study specific cases in one language or multilanguage. In China: Guo Changhong (2010) applied the semantic field theory to teach English vocabulary for students; Chunming Gao and Bin Xu (2013) applied it to study English vocabulary, and Zhou, Weijie (2001) studied the semantic field in English. In Iran, Parvaneh Khosravizadeh and Samira Mollaei (2011) studied auxiliary particle in the sense of the semantic field approach. In Oman, Ali Nasser Harb Mansouru (2012) studied translation issues in the semantic fields of English and Arabic. In Ukraine, Anna Smoliana, PG (2013), and Jamil Qasim Hameed (2013), etc.

In Vietnam, linguists have inherited the achievements of foreign authors about the semantic field theory such as Tu. N.V (1967), Chau. D.H (2007), Hung. D.V (2010), Khanh. N.T (1996), Toan. B.M (1999), (2012), (2014) and Tam. D.T.H (2011) as well as some masters such as Thao. D.P (2010), Thoa. M.T.M (2012) etc.

2. The semantic field theory

a. The semantic field definition

A semantic field is a set of words or lexemes related to meaning. Chau, D. H (1970, p.170) has defined semantic field relations more specifically as "a set of lexemes which cover a certain conceptual and bear certain specific relations to one another". Hence, the semantic relation between words has to be considered in the semantic field system. The lexemes in the same semantic field have common semantemes and of course they also have their semantemes. Moreover, when

analyzing the semantic relations between semantic fields, the key point is to position them in the broader semantic field system.

b. Semantic field categories

According to Chau, D. H (2007, p.170), the semantic field was divided into two categories: horizontal and vertical semantic fields. The vertical semantic field can be based on the meaning of words to distinguish the denotat and significate semantic fields. Furthermore, the associatively semantic field is established based on characteristics of association.

- Vertical semantic field

+ Denotat semantic field

A denotat semantic field is a set of words that are related to each other in terms of denotatum. The denotat semantic fields differ in the number of words, the arrangement of units, and distribution domain in each language. When a word has many denotata, it may belong to different semantic fields. The semantic fields can penetrate and interfere with one another when some words can be figured out in these semantic fields. The relation of words to each denotat semantic field is not the same. Some words are close-knit to the semantic field while some have very blur features to this semantic field. Based on the nature and relationship between the word and the semantic field, there are core characteristics that define the semantic field, including prototypes. As a result, the farther the gap between characteristics of words and the core characteristics is, the less the involvement in this semantic field is.

+ Significate semantic field

A Significate semantic field is a set of words that have the same significate structure. Moreover, a broad significate semantic field can also be divided into smaller significate semantic fields with different densities. Because a word has many significate meanings, they can belong to different significate semantic fields. The significate semantic fields interfere with and

penetrate each other, but the core characteristics are also preserved, especially in prototypes. To determine a significant semantic field, we base on a certain significant semantic structure as the root.

- **Horizontal semantic field**

The horizontal semantic field first comes from the linearity of the linguistic signal; the signals take turn successively into a sequence that cannot occur simultaneously. Therefore this relationship is called horizontal relation or syntagmatic relation. To have a syntagmatic relationship with each other, the elements must perform the same function in terms of language or communication content. Thanks to the syntagmatic relationship, words expose their grammatical and lexical meanings. To create a linear semantic field, we choose a given word and then examine all words that have a similar relationship to the meaning of the root word, then combine them into acceptable linear sequences in a language.

- **Associative semantic field**

An associative semantic field is a set of words representing things, phenomena, activities, and properties, etc which have an associative relationship with the root word. To form an associative semantic field, the words first and foremost must belong to the horizontal and vertical semantic fields. Besides, words in an associative semantic field depend on the possible associative meanings of the given word. The associative semantic field also has many associative words that simultaneously appear with the root of words in relatively homogeneous and repetitive themes. Therefore, the associative semantic field has features of nationalism, age, and individuality. They may have words with similar denotatum but also have different connotative meanings. As can be seen that each associative semantic field is established thanks to the similarities which are not related to the position in the speech sequence as well as to the substitution for each other.

c. The central and boundary of the semantic field

A semantic field is characterized by systematic, hierarchical, synonymous, antonymous, central, and boundary features. However, only the central and

boundary in the semantic field are examined because the article mainly focuses on investigating this phenomenon. A word can have a wide range of meanings that may belong to different semantic fields. This phenomenon occurred in the boundary region which known as the interference phenomenon in the semantic field. In a semantic field, the numbers of words belong to the central region accounting for a small rate. In contrast, the majority of words belonging to the boundary area can be units in different semantic fields. Thanks to the interferences phenomenon in semantic fields, words allocated in the central region of the animal semantic field will be listed to analyze the semantic change from the animal semantic field to the human semantic field.

d. Semantic changes

Language is the most effective means of communication and the tool for human thinking. Language has multi-valence which means using the finite to denote the infinite. This rule is introduced in all aspects of linguistics: phonetics, semantics, morphology, and syntax. In the semantic aspect, two or more words possessing the same form and related meanings, they are termed polysemy. Theoretically, a given word originally has one denotatum, but it is gradually added new denotatum to refer to new concepts. The alternation of denotatum makes the language more and more diverse which promptly meets communication demand. The linguistic units always transform which initially only accepted by individuals, then gradually become broadly accepted in terms of scale in the communicative process. The diversification of meaning and the alternation of the meaning of words are also associated with the semantic fields. Because there are words with many denotata, they can be seen in many denotat semantic fields or many subfields depending on the number of denotatum of words. The semantic change of words often entails the semantic field change. When words appear with new meaning, they also retain some nuances of the original meaning which makes the expression more smooth and flexibly. Therefore, language acquisition is a complex thinking process related to culture, mindsets, and language rules.

C. Research methodology

1. Data collection

The data served for this study was collected from Vietnamese dictionaries written by authors – Anh. D.D (2009) and Phe. H (2011). Besides, the data was also collected from the daily communication of Vietnamese people to investigate all the phenomena of semantic change from animal to human. At last, the data was deliberately divided into categories. These groups belong to the center of each semantic field and other ones are contained in the boundary or intersecting area.

2. Linguistic methods and tactics

a. The method of seme analysis

This method is an essential factor for analyzing the transformation of the meanings of words from the animal semantic field to the human semantic field in Vietnam.

b. Method of description

This method is used to describe the semantic change and phenomena in the study.

3. Tactics of statistics and classification:

These tactics determine the number of words at the center of each semantic field as well as the words in the intersecting area.

D. Findings

Every semantic field has words in the center and boundary. It is undeniable that there are large intersections between human and animal semantic. The language itself is originally used to show people's cognition about the body parts, actions, sounds, emotional psychology, etc. The characteristic of humans is to take place as the root which means that objects and phenomena in society are referenced by the characteristics of human beings. As a result, humans tend to use the names of their body parts to nominate other things, including animals. Therefore, in terms of synchronic, we have several words lying on the boundary between the human and animal semantic fields.

According to Hien's statistic research (2020), the number of Vietnamese human body parts showed 234 cases. To nominate 234 human body parts, in Vietnamese there were 325

names which included 270 Vietnamese names and 55 borrowed ones mainly from Chinese and Indo-European languages. All these words belong to the intersecting area between the human and animal semantic fields.

Consequently, these words were out of research aims, so they were removed from our research. Fortunately, there are 46 words in the center of the animal semantic field, including: *Sủa* (bark), *hí* (whinny), *hót* (twitter), *gầm* (roar), *rú* (yowl), *ăng* (yelp), *rống* (roar), *đớp* (bait), *mỏ* (peck), *cụp* (lower), *đuôi* (tail), *vẽnh tai* (prick ears), *mỏ* (neb), *mồm* (neb), *đánh hơi* (scent), *líu lo* (chirp), *ríu rít* (Twitter), *phi* (gallop), *trườn* (crawl), *bò* (crawl), *riả* (bait), *mớm* (feed), *đằm* (soak), *húc* (butt), *vờn* (play), *vây* (fin), *cánh* (wings), *mang* (gill), *vảy* (scales), *càng* (pincers), *yếm* (overalls of a crab), *bong bóng* (bladder), *phao câu* (rump), *mề* (gizzard), *mào* (crest), *chạ* (beel), *bờm* (mane), *vuốt* (claws), *vó* (horse step), *vỏ* (shell), *nọc* (venom), *kén* (silkworm), *mai* (tortoise shell), *lông* (feather), *ngà* (ivory), *cẳng* (leg).

Thus, the data showed that 46 words were in the central region of the animal semantic field, and their semantic change transformed from the animal semantic field to the human semantic field.

E. Discussion

Words of the animal semantic field are simultaneously transformed into the human semantic field. Only two words retain their positive meanings after this change, which are: “líu lo” (twitter), and “ríu rít” (chitter); for example: ‘*chúng nó chơi đùa với nhau rất là ríu rít*’ (they play together in a chitter-like way), ‘*cậu bé ngheu ngao hát líu lo như chim*’ (the kid naively sings as birds twitter).

The semantic change of the 46 remaining words has a new meaning related to people but still retains nuances of their original negative meaning, for instances: in the sentence: “*Thằng này chả làm được tích sự gì, chỉ được cái hót là giỏi*”, (This guy can do nothing, except for being good at “twittering”). There is another case as “*sủa*” (bark) in a collocation: “*mày đừng có sủa nữa D ơi!*” (don’t bark anymore D!). When the center words of the animal semantic field are transformed into the human semantic field, they almost remain the negative meanings. About Vietnamese culture, many animals even bear symbols of evil, the cruelty of the fox, the stupidity and filth of a dog, but the bird’s song has a beautiful symbol in transformed meaning. This is the Vietnamese people’s unique cognition of animals.

F. Conclusion

To sum up, the research shows the semantic field theory in several aspects such as the concept of the semantic field, semantic field categories, the phenomena of the center and boundary of the semantic field, and semantic field change. A total of 234 common words were figured out in the intersecting area of both human and animal semantic fields. The center region of the animal semantic field includes 46 words which can change their meaning from animal to human semantic field to describe the human characteristics. In the semantic field change process, these words still maintain their original nuances of meaning and combined with the new meaning either positive or negative. However, the number of negative words is only 2 cases while the negative words make up 44 cases. Therefore, most of the words are changed from the animal semantic field to the human semantic field in a negative way. For example, to some extent the Vietnamese residents argue in some geographically informal contexts, they partly tend to employ words in the animal semantic field. These stems are derived from the awareness of the animals of the Vietnamese.

Bibliography

A. Vietnamese language

1. Anh. D.D (2009), *Hán Việt Từ điển (giản yếu)*, Nxb, VH-TT.
2. Chau. D.H (1998), *Cơ sở ngữ nghĩa học từ vựng*, Nxb, Giáo dục, H.
3. Chau. D.H (2007), *Từ vựng ngữ nghĩa tiếng Việt*, Nxb, ĐHQG, HN.
4. Din. L.V (2010), *Trường ngữ nghĩa các yếu tố ngôn ngữ liên quan đến nước trong ca dao, tục ngữ người Việt*, t/c NN & VH số 9.
5. Giap. N.T (1999), *Từ vựng học tiếng Việt*, Nxb, GD.
6. Ha. N.T.T (2009), *Trường nghĩa lửa trong Truyện Kiều của Nguyễn Du và Thơ Tố Hữu*, LV thạc sỹ khoa học ngữ văn ĐHSP-HN.
7. Hung. D.V (2010), *Một số khía cạnh ứng dụng trường nghĩa trong hoạt động giao tiếp*, t/c NN số 3.
8. Hien. N.T (2020), *Sự phát ngữ nghĩa của từ dưới góc độ ngôn ngữ học tri nhận (qua nhóm từ chỉ bộ phận cơ thể người trong tiếng Việt)*, Nxb, KHXH, Hanoi, Vietnam.
9. Khanh. N.T (1996), *Đặc điểm trường từ vựng – ngữ nghĩa tên gọi động vật (trên tư liệu đối chiếu tiếng Việt với tiếng Nga)*, Luận án phó tiến sĩ khoa học ngữ văn, Viện NN học.

10. Lyons. J. (2009), *Ngữ nghĩa học dẫn luận* (Translated by Nguyen Van Hiep), Nxb, GD.
11. Phe. H (2011), *Từ điển tiếng Việt*, Nxb, Đà Nẵng.
12. F. De Saussure (1973), *Giáo trình ngôn ngữ học đại cương*, Nxb, KHXH.
13. Tam. D.T.H (2011), *Trường từ vựng – ngữ nghĩa món ăn và ý niệm CON NGƯỜI*, t/c NN số 5.
14. Thao. D.P (2010), *Đặc điểm tri nhận của người Việt qua trường từ vựng “thức ăn”*, Luận văn Thạc sĩ, ĐHSP Hà Nội.
15. Thiem. L.Q (2008), *Ngữ nghĩa học (tập bài giảng)*, Nxb, GD, HN.
16. Thoá. M.T.M (2012), *Trường nghĩa cánh đồng trong Ca dao người Việt*, Luận văn Thạc sĩ, ĐHSP Hà Nội.
17. Toan. B.M (1999), *Từ trong hoạt động giao tiếp tiếng Việt*, Nxb, GD.
18. Toan. B.M (2012), *Lựa trong Truyện Kiều*, t/c TĐH & BKT số 3.
- 19 Toan. B.M (2014), *Từ ngữ chỉ mùi vị trong Truyện Kiều*, t/c TĐH&BKT, 1.
20. Ton. N.D (2008), *Đặc trưng văn hóa – Dân tộc của ngôn ngữ và tư duy*, Nxb, KHXH.
21. Tu. N.V (1976), *Từ và vốn từ tiếng Việt hiện đại*, Nxb, ĐH & THCN, HN.

B. Other languages

22. Adrienne Lehrer (1985), *The influence of semantic fields on semantic change*. In: J. Fisiak (ed.), *Historical Semantic, Historical Word formation*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and co. pp. 283-296;
<http://lehrer.faculty.arizona.edu/sites/lehrer.faculty.arizona.edu/files/Semantic%20fields%20and%20change.pdf>. (truy cập 25/2/2014).
23. Adrienne Lehrer, Eva Feder Kittay (1992), *Frames, Fields, and Contrast (New Essay in Semantic and Lexical Organization)*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers Hillsdale, New Jersey Hove and London.
24. Ali Nasser Harb Mansouri (2012) *Semantic Fields in English and Arabic: Problems in Translation* (được in trong cuốn *Building Bridges: Integrating Languages, Linguistics, Literature, and Translation in Pedagogy and Research* của Najma Al Zidjaly, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman, published by the Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
25. Bert Peeters (1991), *A Few Remarks on Terminological Insecurity in Semantic Field Theory*, *Quaderni di semantic/ a. XII, n. 2*, pp. 335-343.

26. Chunming Gao và Bin Xu (2013), *The Application of Semantic Field Theory to English Vocabulary Learning*, Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vo.3, No. 11, pp. 2035. Academy Publisher Manufacture in Finland.
27. Dirk Geeraerts (2010), *Theories of Lexical Semantics*, Oxford University Press.
28. G. Ipsen (1932), *Der neue Sprachbegriff*, "Zeitschrift für Deutschkunde", Leipzig – Berlin.
29. G. Müller (1957), *Wortfeld und Sprachfeld*, "Beiträge zur Einheit von Bildung und Sprache im geistigen Sein. Festschrift für Ernst Otto", Berlin.
30. Grzegorz A. Kleparski, Angelina Rusinek (2007), *The tradition of field theory and the study of lexical semantic change*, Zeszyt, volume 47, pp. 187-205;
31. Guo, Changhong, (2010) *The application of the semantic field theory in college English vocabulary instruction*, Chinese journal of applied linguistics, volume 33, no 3. pp. 50-62.
32. Igor A. Mel'cuk – André Clas – Alain Polguère (1995), *Intruduction à la lexicologie explicative et combinatoire*, Editions Duculot.
33. Jamil Qasim Hameed (2013), *Evaluation of the Semantic field theory and Componential Analysis as Theoretical Approaches of Potential Value to Vocabulary Acquisition: with Special Reference to the Learner's Collocational Competence*, Journal of the College of Arts. University of Basra, No 64.
34. Lina Inciuraitė (2013), *The Semantics of Colors in John Milton's Poem Paradise Lost*. Studies about Languages. No 23. pp. 95-103.
 Nguồn: http://www.kalbos.lt/zurnalai/23_numeris/12.pdf. (truy cập 2/3/2014).
35. Parvaneh Khosravizadeh, Samira Mollaei (2011), *Incidental Vocabulary Learning: A Semantic Field Approach*, Brain. Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience, Volum 2, Issue 3, September.
36. Paul Ricoeur (2007), *The Rule of Metaphor (The creation of meaning in language)*, London and New York.
37. Ricardo Mairal Usón (1990), *The Semantic Field of Light and Darkness in Paradise Lost*. Sederi: Yearbook of the Spanish and Portuguese Society for English Renaissance Studies, no 1, pp. 189-208.
 Nguồn: Ricardo Mairal Usón, [/www.sederi.org/docs/yearbooks/01/1_13_mairal.pdf](http://www.sederi.org/docs/yearbooks/01/1_13_mairal.pdf). (truy cập 16/8/2013).
38. Zhou, Weijie (2001), *A New Research on English Semantic Field*. Journal of Beijing International Studies University, 102, 30-35.

39. Zoltán Kövecses (2002), *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*, Oxford University Press.