SEMANTIC CHANGE IN SPOKEN DISCOURSE: EVIDENCE FROM ENGLISH AND UZBEK

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Abstract. Semantic change is the development of new meanings or the modification of existing meanings of linguistic expressions. It is especially visible in spoken discourse, where speakers adapt words to context, social relationships, emotions, and communicative goals. This paper outlines major types of semantic change and compares illustrative examples from English and Uzbek. The analysis focuses on metaphor, metonymy, semantic broadening and narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and pragmatic meaning. It argues that both languages use context-dependent meaning-making strategies, although the cultural associations and conventional expressions may differ. The paper is a theoretical and illustrative comparison rather than a corpus-based quantitative study.

Keywords: semantic change, spoken discourse, English, Uzbek, pragmatics, metaphor, meaning

Introduction. Language is constantly changing because speakers use it to express new experiences, social identities, attitudes, and relationships. Words do not always retain one fixed meaning: their interpretation can shift according to the situation in which they are used. Semantic change refers to a change in the meaning of a word or expression over time, while spoken discourse provides a setting in which new interpretations can emerge, spread, and eventually become conventional.

Semantics studies linguistic meaning, whereas pragmatics examines how meaning is interpreted in a particular communicative situation. The two fields are closely connected: a speaker may use a familiar word in a new way, and the listener infers the intended meaning from context, shared knowledge, tone, and the relationship between participants. [1]Ullmann (1962) discusses several major mechanisms of semantic change, including metaphor, metonymy, and shifts in evaluation. [2]Traugott and Dasher (2002) show that pragmatic inferences can become conventional meanings through repeated use. Metaphor transfers meaning on the basis of perceived similarity. For example, English speakers may say “a warm person” to describe someone friendly; warmth from the physical domain is applied to emotional experience. Metonymy works through association rather than similarity, as when “the White House” is used to refer to the US administration. Semantic broadening occurs when a word comes to cover more situations, while narrowing restricts its range. Amelioration gives a word a more positive meaning, whereas pejoration develops a more negative one. These processes may begin in particular contexts and spread through a community.

English conversation frequently uses metaphorical expressions. In “That idea is brilliant,” brilliant does not refer to literal brightness but to intellectual quality. Similarly, “I am drowning in work” expresses being overwhelmed rather than being physically underwater.[3] Such expressions make abstract

[1] Ullmann, S. (1962). Semantics: An introduction to the science of meaning. Basil Blackwell.
[2] Traugott, E. C.,&Dasher, R. B. (2002). Regularity in semantic change. Cambridge University Press.
[3] Lakoff, G.,&Johnson, M. (1980). Metaphors we live by. University of Chicago Press.

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experiences easier to communicate and illustrate the role of conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metonymy is also common in everyday English. In "The classroom was listening," classroom refers to the people in it. "I need to talk to management" uses management to refer to the people who manage an organization. Conversational meaning may also become evaluative: words can gain positive or negative associations through repeated social use. Irony and teasing can reverse the apparent meaning of an utterance, so "Great job!" may express genuine praise or criticism depending on context.

Uzbek spoken discourse also relies on metaphor, metonymy, and context-sensitive meaning. Expressions such as "ko'ngli keng" literally relate to a "wide heart" but describe generosity or tolerance. The phrase "boshi osmonga yetdi" ("their head reached the sky") conveys great happiness or pride rather than a physical movement. These examples show how bodily and spatial experiences are used to express abstract emotions, a pattern also found in English.In everyday Uzbek, some words acquire meanings beyond their literal sense. "Shirin" means "sweet" in relation to taste, but in expressions such as "shirin gap" it refers to pleasant or affectionate speech. "Og'ir odam" may describe a serious, restrained, or dignified person rather than someone physically heavy. The exact interpretation depends on context, intonation, and local usage. Differences are more apparent in the particular expressions and their cultural associations. For example, English "cool" has several informal evaluative meanings, while Uzbek "shirin" can extend from taste to pleasant speech or affectionate interaction. These are not exact equivalents: each expression belongs to its own linguistic and cultural system. Uzbek forms of address and honorific choices may make social relationships especially visible, while English informal expressions may rely strongly on tone, discourse markers, and shared conversational norms. Such tendencies should be tested with larger datasets rather than treated as absolute differences between the languages.

Conclusion. Semantic change in spoken discourse demonstrates that meaning is dynamic and shaped by use. English and Uzbek both employ metaphor, metonymy, broadening, narrowing, and evaluative shifts to make communication flexible and expressive. The interpretation of an utterance depends not only on its words but also on context, shared knowledge, tone, and social relationships. Although the underlying cognitive mechanisms are broadly similar, individual expressions reflect the cultural and pragmatic conventions of each language.

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