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***THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF ‘SMELL’
IN AMERICAN ENGLISH***

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Synonymy has long been a central topic in linguistics research, mainly in fields like lexicology, lexicography, semantics, and pragmatics. Despite some periods of apparent consistency in research trends, approaches to synonymy have generally been uneven, particularly with regard to the classification of synonyms (closely tied to the varying theoretical perspectives on meaning that scholars have adopted), to the type and number of synonyms considered, their contextual behaviour, and the methods used to investigate them.

The diverse approaches to synonymy have undoubtedly advanced our understanding of the phenomenon, but they have also opened the door for novel analytical perspectives. The opportunity to build on existing research (which she proves to be very well familiar with) in order to come up with fresh perspectives has been taken aboard by Daniela Pettersson-Traba, in her book *The Development of the Concept of SMELL in American English*.

Her study employs a corpus-based methodology, integrating elements from the distributional approach, usage-based onomasiology, and historical linguistics within the broader framework of cognitive semantics. It focuses on a group of five near-synonymous adjectives associated with the concept PLEASANT SMELLING: *fragrant*, *perfumed*, *scented*, *sweet-scented*, and *sweet-smelling*. The contextual occurrences of these adjectives are extracted from the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA) and their distributional patterns are analysed, with the primary aim of highlighting their functional similarities and differences.

Following two introductory chapters that contextualize the study within the broader trends in synonymy research, and establish its overarching objectives (*Introduction*, and *Synonymy*), the third chapter (*The Concept PLEASANT SMELLING*) transitions the reader towards the analytical core of the book. The chapter begins with the author's justification of the selection of the synonymic set, drawing on information about synonyms in the semantic field of PLEASANT SMELLING in eight contemporary English dictionaries. Subsequently, the COHA is introduced, and the methodology for constructing the two databases central to the analysis is outlined in

detail. The chapter also provides an account of how these databases were annotated according to eleven distinct variables: language-internal semantic variables (sense, semantic category, animacy, concreteness, countability), language-internal non-semantic variables (syntactic function and degree), and language-external variables (the temporal span during which the collocations containing the terms under scrutiny as nodes were recorded and the type of text in which they appeared).

Thus, Chapter four, *Semasiological and Onomasiological Analyses of the Synonym Set*, examines the language-internal variables Sense and Semantic category. From a semasiological perspective, the key results of the analysis in this part of the book reveal that the concept PLEASANT SMELLING and the five adjectives under analysis exhibit varying frequencies across the four time periods documented in the COHA, spanning the time from 1810 to 2009. Furthermore, their distribution across natural, artificial, figurative, and indeterminate senses also shifts over time in terms of frequency, with some of the adjectives being inclined towards one or some of the senses over the others. The most obvious diachronic distributional variation consists of the transition from the concept (and its corresponding adjectives) predominantly referring to natural smells to increasingly referring to artificial ones. This is reflected in the senses of the nouns which collocate with the five adjectives that indicate pleasant smells.

When adopting an onomasiological perspective on the five near-synonymous adjectives set in the latter part of the chapter, the author concludes that diachronic shifts in their frequency are not uniform across all contexts of use, but are instead confined to specific semantic functions.

To sum up the results of her two-sided investigation in Chapter four, she points out that the semantic development of the five synonyms is characterized by attraction and ongoing substitution.

The discussion of context-related frequency variation is taken further in the next chapter, *In-depth Onomasiological Analysis of the Synonym Set: A Multivariate Approach*. Here, the focus falls on testing the models that can be applied to assess the adequacy of the variables in predicting the choice of the adjectives in the synonymous set on particular occasions of use. The models discussed include multinomial and mixed-effects regression approaches, which demonstrate notable advantages. However, these models are shown to be effective only up to a certain point, highlighting the need for further refinements to account for the full range of variation present in the data, including a closer look at the idiosyncratic collocational behaviour of the near-synonyms.

A sample of how this behaviour can be approached is offered in Chapter six, *Idiosyncratic Collocational Preferences of the Near-synonyms*, where Daniela Pettersson Traba zooms in on the noun collocates (in a L5 – R5 context window) of three of the near-synonyms in the set under investigation. The initial analysis, which uses Semantic Vector Space modeling, reveals potential semantic shifts in the collocational patterns of these near-synonyms. Building on these findings, the author further conducts a qualitative investigation of their most prominent collocates, categorized as consistent, initiating, terminating, and transient. Besides emphasizing the highly idiosyncratic collocational patterns of the adjectives, the conclusions

drawn in this chapter corroborate earlier findings: some of the near-synonyms tend to prefer the natural sense, while others show a preference for the artificial sense and the frequency of these synonyms varies across the time periods represented in the corpus. Specifically, the study demonstrates at this point that synonyms experiencing a decrease in number of their collocates over time also tend to show a decline in their overall frequency.

If so far in the book the data have been approached from a linguistic perspective, in the last chapter, *The Concept PLEASANT SMELLING: A Victim of Societal Change*, the perspective is an extra-linguistic one. First, a dictionary-based approach is used to identify whether the frequency of the most prominent noun collocates of the near-synonyms fluctuates in time in the *COHA* in general, not only when they are used specifically with the adjectives under scrutiny. Then, a data-driven approach is employed to look at the same kind of diachronic behaviour of the associations of these collocates with other words in the corpus. The findings validate a previously drawn conclusion, too: the concept PLEASANT SMELLING evolves in time from being applied predominantly to natural smell to being used for artificial smell more often. What the results of the analysis in this chapter bring new is that this evolution of the concept follows the evolution of extra-linguistic, societal developments in the United States, in the period covered by the *COHA* - more exactly, those implied by the Industrial Revolution and its consequences on the mass production of goods and the extensive access to them, coupled with a move away from the natural world.

In this book, the author successfully fulfills the research objectives she outlines in the Introduction. She provides valuable insights into a semantic field that, while rich and complex, has been underexplored in prior works. By employing synchronic methods to address near-synonymy diachronically (which has not been extensively done so far, hence one aspect that contributes to the novelty of her work), she demonstrates the efficacy of using such methods in longitudinal semantic research. Quite notably, her analysis encompasses an unusually large number of near-synonymous expressions, which are examined across a diverse range of usage contexts. Furthermore, the adoption of a corpus-based methodology not only ensures the relevance of Pettersson-Traba's study as an up to date type of research, but it also contributes to highlighting the potential of corpus linguistics in semantics research, thus adding to studies that have so far underscored it (e.g. Lindquist (2009), Geeraerts (2010), McEnery, Hardie (2012), Stefanowitsch (2020)). From a theoretical perspective, the findings offer robust evidence that the process of attraction plays a more significant role in language change than has been acknowledged in much of the existing scholarship on synonymy. This insight, in turn, suggests that the mechanisms driving the diachronic evolution of semantically related words and expressions, including near-synonyms, are more intricate than previously understood. Beyond the well-documented processes of differentiation and substitution, others, like attraction and convergence, influenced by extralinguistic factors, may also contribute to these evolutionary patterns.

Pettersson-Traba's book is primarily aimed at a professional audience, as the depth and complexity of the analysis necessitate expertise in the field to fully grasp its development and significance. For such an audience, it may serve, as the

author herself desires, as a source of inspiration to go deeper into the intricacies of diachronic semantics, especially when investigated with big data instruments. Some of the possible avenues to take in future research are actually indicated in the concluding chapter.

Nevertheless, the book may also prove rewarding for readers with less specialized knowledge of semantics and corpus linguistics. The author takes care to elucidate the more intricate concepts (e.g. *absolute synonymy* vs. *near-synonymy*, *entrainment*, *salience*, *collocation*, *colligation*, *semantic preference*, *semantic prosody*, *the non-synonymy rule*, etc) and provides thorough explanations of the broader research methodological context within which her analysis is situated (e.g. the *Behavioral Profile approach*, the *semasiological*, the *onomasiological approach* to near-synonyms, etc). Thus, she manages to make her text accessible and informative to a wider audience as well.

For younger researchers, the book may as well be a model of well-planned and carefully carried out research that strikes the right balance between well-grounded theory and empirical data analysis, so as to generate meaningful conclusions.

References

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