

Review Article

THE STRUCTURAL AND FUNCTIONAL FEATURES OF HYPONIMY IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN

<sup>1</sup>Masharipova Nargiza Otaxonovna, <sup>2</sup>Yakubov Zafar Kudratovich

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Philology, Urgench State University, Urgench, Uzbekistan. E-mail address: [narziss\\_0787@mail.ru](mailto:narziss_0787@mail.ru)

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Abstract

This study explores structural and functional features of hyponymy in English and Russian as well as peculiarities of hierarchical composition stemming from cultural structure of each language. Hyponymical relations of several words are analyzed in contrasted languages by means of comparing lexical units denoting the same phenomenon. The paper also aims at revealing the features of troponymic relations in English and Russian through specific examples.

**Key word:** hyponym, hypernym, paradigmatic relations, structural, functional, superordinate, countable, uncountable, troponymy.

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INTRODUCTION

Hyponymy is a sense relation between predicates (or sometimes longer phrases) such that the meaning of one predicate (or phrase) is included in the meaning of the other [1, p. 109]. According to Cruse, hyponymy is one of the most important structuring relations in the vocabulary which occurs in a wide range of content domains and in all major syntactic categories [2, p. 20]. E. E. Kotsova states a similar idea: "Типонимические связи слов привлекают внимание лингвистов как важнейший способ парадигматической организации лексики, как когнитивный аналог родовидовых отношений в русской концептосфере" [3, p. 10].

It is obvious that hyponymy is essential in structuring a language as it helps to link separate terms to a specific concept. Apart from that, this relationship facilitates language learning. "In our early learning of our native language we acquire such general terms as game, tool, instrument and animal by being told some of the hyponyms included under these terms" [4, p. 96]. Hyponymy, being a cross-linguistic phenomenon, possesses the same pattern of hierarchical classification of vocabulary both in Russian and English. e.g. cat, dog, cow < animal. This chain means that "cat", "dog" and "cow" are hyponyms of "animal", the word "animal" standing in hypernym – hyponym relation with its subtypes, translated into Russian: кошка, собака, корова < животное.

But despite the general similarity between two languages, certain differences may occur in various contexts. Those are usually motivated by peculiarities of word-formation in the analyzed languages. For example, the hypernym "fruit" can be both countable and uncountable depending on a context. Namely, if we specifically emphasize the types of fruit, we can add s at the end of the word: "Today, watermelon remains one of the favorite fruits of Vietnam" (Two Cakes Fit for a King: Folktales from Vietnam, Nguyen Nguyet Cam). But if we consider "fruit" collectively and non-specifically, the superordinate remains in its singular form: "I eat a lot of fruit now and could sure can use a piece" (Lavyrle Spencer, Small town girl). The conclusion can be drawn that when the word fruit is followed by it's hyponyms, or at least when hyponyms are implied, it takes plural form. In Russian, however, the superordinate «фрукт» is always countable and its plural is formed with the ending "ы" regardless of the context, as in (Игорь Афонский, «Здравствуй – Прощай» раздел 9) «Есть дыни, сухофрукты, свежие яблоки, ягоды, другие многочисленные фрукты».

In all the aforementioned examples, the word "fruit" is defined as follows: "a type of food that grows on trees or plants, it tastes sweet and contains seeds or a stone" [5]. Apart from that, "fruit" can have another definition: "the part of a plant that has the seeds in it" [6]. Yet in the Russian language, the equivalent word to denote this meaning is "плод": "часть растения, развивающаяся из завязи цветка и содержащая семена" [7, с. 1929]. In this sense "плод" stands in the relation hypernym – hyponym to the word "фрукт" (плоды – фрукты, овощи) since the Russian word "фрукты" does not encompass the equal range of meanings as its English equivalent "fruit".

In a similar manner, the noun "fish" takes ending "s" in its plural when comes together with types of species, or hyponyms: "The Quinnet Salmon, from its great size and abundance, is more valuable than all the other fishes on our Pacific coast taken together". Yet when no species of fish are mentioned in the sentence, the superordinate remains in singular form even though more than one fish is being implied: "In an attempt to plug the dike, creel limits have been pared to three fish per day..." [8, p. 12]. The Russian hypernym "рыба" forms plural with the help of ending "ы" no matter alone or followed by hyponyms: "Когда рыбака привели во дворец, везирь приказал ему пойти и поймать четыре рыбы, точно такие же, как он приносил". Superordinate terms may vary in terms of their count ability or unaccountability and number. But the forms of superordinate do not always coincide in Russian and English. Namely, the word "cutlery" is singular and uncountable. e.g. "Different-sized items of old metal cutlery such as spoons, forks and knives..." (Sound: an investigation, Jack Challoner). As we see, when listing hyponyms one cannot say "different cutleries", the plural is formed by adding the word items to an uncountable superordinate: "different items of cutlery". But the Russian equivalent consists of two words that can take plural form "столовые приборы". What is more, in the context with hyponyms the lexeme "столовые" can be omitted: "Например перед завтраком, обедом или ужином мы привыкли дома накрывать стол, каждому ставить тарелку, а рядом класть вилку, нож, ложку и другие необходимые приборы".

MATERIALS AND METHODS

"The many different kinds of elaborations that distinguish a "verb hyponym" from its superordinate have been merged into a manner relation that Fellbaum and Miller (1990) have dubbed troponymy (from the Greek tropos, manner or fashion)" [9]. When analyzing the structure of vocabulary one can notice the

absence of a superordinate to name a certain action or happening. Kleider in his book revealed the lack of single term to name movement over the ground, what he refers to as lexical gap. In Russian, according to Kotsova, the verb "идти" fulfills this function. 4. двигаться, переступая ногами, пример: И. ПЕШКОМ. И. домой. And in English the verb "go" stands for: - to travel to a place goes to the office every morning; - to travel to and stay in a place for a period of time went to Paris for a month.

Sometimes in English verb hyponyms coincide with nouns in structure. Several subordinate terms of the word "cut", namely dice, cube, slice, mince can serve as an example. Dice (noun) - a small cubical piece (as of food), dice (verb) - to cut into small cubes; cube (noun) - something shaped like a cube, cube (verb) - to form into a cube; slice (noun) - a thin flat piece cut from something, slice (verb) - to cut with or as if with a knife; mince (noun) - small chopped bits (as of food), specifically: mincemeat; mince (verb) - to cut or chop into very small pieces. As we can see, these troponyms represent the act of cutting a food in a shape denoted by their noun forms: "Then I start dicing and slicing vegetables" (Fast, Fresh, & Green, chronicle book by Susie Middleton). An example in Russian: "А куда сложить и как нарезать: соломкой, кубиками, ломтиками?" (Настойчивая принцесса и волшебный посох, Олег Ткачёв.) Obviously, in Russian the verb "cut" (резать) is followed by a word representing certain shape or manner of cutting.

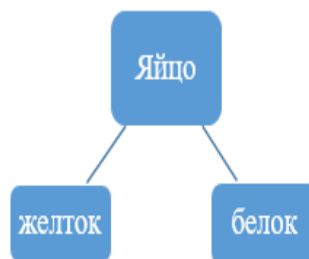
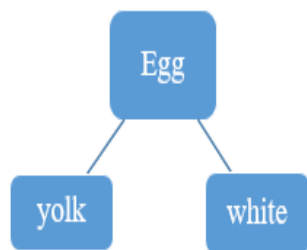
It has been stated that the differences between hyponymic relations in English and Russian are based on the morphological features of the two languages. But Lyons in his book "Introduction to theoretical linguistics" touches upon another important aspect conditioning peculiarities of the semantic relation in two languages. "The most important factor in the hierarchical organization of the vocabulary by means of the relation of hyponymy is the structure of the culture in which the language operates and in which it serves as the principal medium for communication". The author further develops his point: "It is a truism that words referring to artefacts cannot be defined except in relation to the purpose or normal function of the objects they refer to: e.g. school, 'a building where children are taught', house, 'a building where people live'. But this is true of the vocabulary as a whole, which is not only 'anthropocentric

(organized according to general human interests and values), but 'culture-bound'(reflecting the more particular institutions and practices of different cultures)" [10].

Therefore, how similar or different the vocabulary structure of various languages is also depending on the culture of a particular language. This phenomenon can be revealed through the comparison of the languages in question. For instance, the Russian word "деятель" denotes a person who served or is renowned in a certain sphere. Here is its definition in Russian: "Человек, который проявил себя в какой-н. общественной деятельности". One can come across the phrases like "научный деятель", "деятель искусства", "культурный деятель". However, in English there is no superordinate term that could have the same sense, the translation of the word varies according to the context: "scientist", "artist", "cultural figure". Clearly, we can use one term another word that demonstrates the field of activity in the Russian language, while in English it takes a specific word or word-combination for each context that would act as co-hyponyms. It tempts to take the word "figure" as an English equivalent, but let us look at its definition: "figure - a prominent personality", e.g., great figures of history. In contrast to Russian "деятель", "figure" doesn't necessarily mean that a person did something in a certain field. The word "деятель" is stemmed from "деятельность", which is translated into English as "activity". Using the same manner of word-formation, we can obtain a word "activist". However, its meaning changes: "activist - one who advocates or practices activism: a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue".

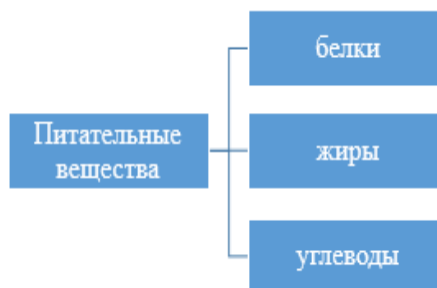
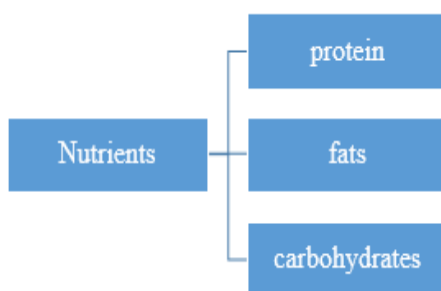
**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In certain situations, one word can stand in hyponymic relation with different lexical units depending on the meaning. And while a Russian word can be polysemantic, it can possess only one meaning in English or vice-versa. Let us take a word "белок" for an example, its first meaning is as follows: "прозрачная часть яйца, белеющая при варке.." In English it is translated as "white (of an egg)". The word chain in this case would look like this:



In this case both "белок" and "white" are meronyms of "egg" as its composite parts. The second definition of "белок" - "высокомолекулярное органическое вещество, обеспечивающее жизнедеятельность животных и

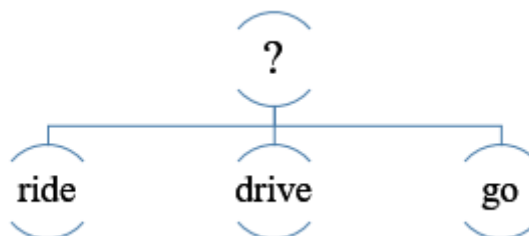
растительных организмов.." [11]. In English it is "protein - a substance found in foods (such as meat, milk, eggs, and beans) that is an important part of the human diet". Obviously, in this situation the word chain will be different.



One noun “белок” may stand both in meronymic and hyponymic relations depending on its meaning. The variation of hyponymic relations in two languages can also occur with verbs. In English there is no single verb to name movement in a transport. People drive when they are at the wheel and ride when they are not driving. However, Russian has a word “ехать” that can denote traveling in any transport (over the ground) whether an individual is driving or not. e.g. “Инна хотела ехать на своей машине, так ей казалось более безопасно и респектабельно” (Дуля с маком, Дарья

Калинина); “Хохолкину стало казаться, что он едет в поезде...” (И мы были... Валерий Ронши).

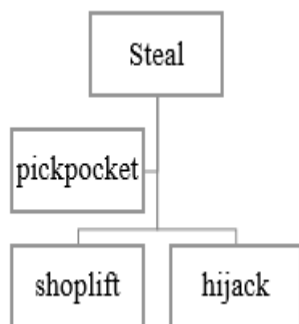
The word “go” can act in the same meaning (go by bus, on train, etc) in a limited number of contexts since it implies movement in direction from the speaker, while for the direction to the speaker the verb “come” should be used. e.g. “Now she was coming by bus, alone...” (The translator by Lella Aboulela); “Ida was the one who heard about the train going from Chicago to Washington, D.C., and said, “Let’s go on that train” (Touch and Go: A Memoir by Studs Terkel).



It is curious to note that the lexical unit “ехать” is exploited in all diverse contexts without the need for hyponyms, whereas in English, in order to express the meaning of the Russian word, we are bound to use various. In a way, the verbs “ride”, “drive”, “go” and others act as hyponyms for the Russian hypernym “ехать”. But it is only when a text is translated from one language to another. In normal situation “ride” and “go”, for example, would not stand in such a relationship.

Contrast may be found between Russian and English when types of “theft” are described. The both languages have a superordinate “steal”, which is translated into Russian as “красть” or “воровать”. Yet English vocabulary features more types of “theft” expressed by a single lexical item while in transit; pickpocket – steal from the pockets of someone; shoplift – steal goods from a shop; hijack – illegally seize (an aircraft, ship, or vehicle) [12]. e.g., “...perhaps he stole them, despite claiming he had never stolen anything in his life until he pickpocketed the handkerchief at the ball...” (Crime, Punishment and Redemption: A convict’s story by June Slee). Example in Russian: “Однако через год и четыре месяца

после истечения срока поручительства Баринов снова совершил карманную кражу” (“Повторность преступлений” В.П. Малков). As we can see, it takes the word “совершить” (commit) + the type of “theft” to convey the meaning of the above mentioned English sentence in Russian. But this is not the case with the hyponym “hijack”, for instance, “... recalling the story of the legendary D. B. Cooper who hijacked a 727 in November 1971...” – “...вспоминая историю легендарного террориста Д. Б. Купера, который угнал «Боинг-727» в ноябре 1971...”. In Russian translation the author used “угнал” for “hijack”. It should be mentioned, though, that “угонять”, despite communicating the idea of the author successfully, does not mean the same as “hijack”. “Угнать – похитить” (скот или транспортное средство), while “hijack” emphasizes seizing a transport in transit, the Russian word simply denotes the action of stealing, whether in transit or not. It is clear now that in the Russian there are no fixed lexical chunks to describe various kinds of theft except for the word “угонять”. Mostly the choice of words is situational and contextual.



Frequently, the words of a target text serving as the counterparts of those from a source text are not necessarily their complete equivalents. The fact that certain lexical units in Russian and English do not have identical meaning is not explained by any linguistic rule, rather, this dissimilarity is motivated by the cultural structure of the language.

**CONCLUSIONS**

This paper studied structural and functional patterns of hyponymic relations in English and Russian. The semantic relation in question is of equal importance in both languages due to its function of organizing vocabulary. Therefore, the general system of hyponymic relations is similar, yet several differences have been revealed through comparison of the same concepts in terms of how the words representing them stand in hypernym – hyponym relation in English and Russian. The contrast is linked to the patterns of word formation in

compared languages. Apart from that the subtleties of cultural structure of vocabularies are the important factor underlying the peculiarities of hyponymic and troponymic relations.

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