

Synonym

A **synonym** is a word or phrase that means exactly or nearly the same as another lexeme (word or phrase) in the same language. Words that are synonyms are said to be **synonymous**, and the state of being a synonym is called **synonymy**. For example, the words *begin*, *start*, *commence*, and *initiate* are all synonyms of one another. Words are typically synonymous in one particular sense: for example, *long* and *extended* in the context *long time* or *extended time* are synonymous, but *long* cannot be used in the phrase *extended family*. Synonyms with exactly the same meaning share a seme or denotational sememe, whereas those with inexactly similar meanings share a broader denotational or connotational sememe and thus overlap within a semantic field. The former are sometimes called cognitive synonyms and the latter, near-synonyms,^[2] plesionyms^[3] or poecilonyms.^[4]

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Synonym list in cuneiform on a clay tablet, Neo-Assyrian period^[4]

Lexicography

Some lexicographers claim that no synonyms have exactly the same meaning (in all contexts or social levels of language) because etymology, orthography, phonic qualities, connotations, ambiguous meanings, usage, and so on make them unique. Different words that are similar in meaning usually differ for a reason: *feline* is more formal than *cat*; *long* and *extended* are only synonyms in one usage and not in others (for example, a *long arm* is not the same as an *extended arm*). Synonyms are also a source of euphemisms.

Metonymy can sometimes be a form of synonymy: *the White House* is used as a synonym of *the administration* in referring to the U.S. executive branch under a specific president. Thus a metonym is a type of synonym, and the word *metonym* is a hyponym of the word *synonym*.

The analysis of synonymy, polysemy, hyponymy, and hypernymy is inherent to taxonomy and ontology in the information-science senses of those terms.^[5] It has applications in pedagogy and machine learning, because they rely on word-sense disambiguation.

Etymology

The word comes from Ancient Greek *sýn* (σύν; "with") and *ónoma* (ὄνομα; "name").

Examples

Synonyms can be any part of speech, as long as both words belong to the same part of speech. Examples:

- noun
 - *drink* and *beverage*
- verb
 - *buy* and *purchase*
- adjective
 - *big* and *large*
- adverb
 - *quickly* and *speedily*
- preposition
 - *on* and *upon*

Synonyms are defined with respect to certain senses of words: *pupil* as the *aperture in the iris of the eye* is not synonymous with *student*. Such like, *he expired* means the same as *he died*, yet *my passport has expired* cannot be replaced by *my passport has died*.

In English, many synonyms emerged in the Middle Ages, after the Norman conquest of England. While England's new ruling class spoke Norman French, the lower classes continued to speak Old English (Anglo-Saxon). Thus, today we have synonyms like the Norman-derived *people*, *liberty* and *archer*, and the Saxon-derived *folk*, *freedom* and *bowman*. For more examples, see the list of Germanic and Latinate equivalents in English.

A thesaurus lists similar or related words; these are often, but not always, synonyms.

- The word ***poecilonym*** is a rare synonym of the word *synonym*. It is not entered in most major dictionaries and is a curiosity or piece of trivia for being an autological word because of its meta quality as a synonym of *synonym*.
- **Antonyms** are words with opposite or nearly opposite meanings. For example: *hot* ↔ *cold*, *large* ↔ *small*, *thick* ↔ *thin*, *synonym* ↔ *antonym*
- **Hypernyms** and **hyponyms** are words that refer to, respectively, a general category and a specific instance of that category. For example, *vehicle* is a hypernym of *car*, and *car* is a hyponym of *vehicle*.
- **Homophones** are words that have the same pronunciation, but different meanings. For example, *witch* and *which* are homophones in most accents (because they are pronounced the same).
- **Homographs** are words that have the same spelling, but have different pronunciations. For example, one can *record* a song or keep a *record* of documents.
- **Homonyms** are words that have the same pronunciation and spelling, but have different meanings. For example, *rose* (a type of flower) and *rose* (past tense of *rise*) are homonyms.

See also

- -onym
- Cognitive synonymy
- Elegant variation, the gratuitous use of a synonym in prose
- Synonym ring
- Synonymy in Japanese

References

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2. Stanojević, Maja (2009), "Cognitive synonymy: a general overview" (<http://facta.junis.ni.ac.rs/lal/lal200902/lal200902-05.pdf>) (PDF), *Facta Universitatis, Linguistics and Literature series*, 7 (2): 193–200.
3. DiMarco, Chrysanne, and Graeme Hirst. "Usage notes as the basis for a representation of near-synonymy for lexical choice." Proceedings of 9th annual conference of the University of Waterloo Centre for the New Oxford English Dictionary and Text Research. 1993.
4. Grambs, David. *The Endangered English Dictionary: Bodacious Words Your Dictionary Forgot*. WW Norton & Company, 1997.
5. Hirst, Graeme. "Ontology and the lexicon (ftp://ftp.db.toronto.edu/public_html/dist/gh/Hirst-Ontol-2009-as-publish-ed.pdf)." *Handbook on ontologies*. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2009. 269-292.

External links

Tools which graph words relations:

- [GraphWords \(https://graphwords.com/\)](https://graphwords.com/) – Online tool for visualization word relations
- [Synonyms.net \(http://www.synonyms.net/\)](http://www.synonyms.net/) – Online reference resource that provides instant synonyms and antonyms definitions including visualizations, voice pronunciations and translations
- [English/French Semantic Atlas \(http://www.atlas-semantic.eu/?l=EN\)](http://www.atlas-semantic.eu/?l=EN) – Graph words relations in English, French and gives cross representations for translations – offers 500 searches per user per day.

Plain words synonyms finder:

- [Synonym Finder \(https://www.synonym-finder.com/\)](https://www.synonym-finder.com/) – Synonym finder including hypernyms in search result
- [Thesaurus \(http://trovami.altervista.org/sinonimi/en\)](http://trovami.altervista.org/sinonimi/en) – Online synonyms in English, Italian, French and German
- [Woxikon Synonyms \(http://synonyms.woxikon.com/\)](http://synonyms.woxikon.com/) – Over 1 million synonyms – English, German, Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Swedish and Dutch
- [FindMeWords Synonyms \(http://www.findmewords.com/synonyms.html\)](http://www.findmewords.com/synonyms.html) – Online Synonym Dictionary with definitions
- [Classic Thesaurus \(http://www.classicthesaurus.com\)](http://www.classicthesaurus.com) – Crowdsourced synonym dictionary
- [Power Thesaurus \(https://www.powerthesaurus.org/\)](https://www.powerthesaurus.org/) – Synonym dictionary with definitions and examples

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