

**FROM LEXEMES TO MEANING: A DEEPER LOOK INTO WORD COMBINATIONS****Toshnazarova Dilnavoz Olimovna, teacher**

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**Annotation:** This article explores the relationship between lexemes and meaning construction through word combinations, focusing on how linguistic units interact within syntactic and semantic frameworks. Drawing on established linguistic theories such as structuralism, generative grammar, and cognitive linguistics, the study analyzes how meaning emerges not from isolated lexemes but from their combinatory properties. The paper employs descriptive and analytical methodologies, supported by examples from English and cross-linguistic data. The findings demonstrate that meaning is shaped by syntagmatic relations, collocational patterns, and contextual constraints, emphasizing the dynamic nature of language.

**Keywords:** lexeme, semantics, syntax, collocation, word combination, meaning construction, linguistic theory

**Introduction**

Language is a complex system in which meaning is not merely the sum of individual words but arises from the interaction between them. The concept of the lexeme, defined as the abstract unit underlying a set of word forms, plays a central role in understanding vocabulary and meaning. However, lexemes alone do not convey complete meaning; rather, their combinations within phrases and sentences generate semantic structures [1].

The study of word combinations has long been central to linguistic inquiry. Structural linguistics emphasized syntagmatic relations, while generative grammar focused on rule-based combinations. More recently, cognitive linguistics has highlighted the role of conceptualization and usage in shaping meaning [2]. This article aims to synthesize these perspectives to provide a deeper understanding of how lexemes combine to form meaning.

**Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach based on existing linguistic literature. Data are drawn from established corpora and theoretical frameworks, including structuralist, generative, and cognitive linguistic models.

The research involves:

- Analysis of lexical and syntactic patterns in English
- Examination of collocations and phraseological units
- Comparative references to cross-linguistic examples
- Review of scholarly literature to ensure factual grounding

The methodological framework is based on works by leading linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Noam Chomsky, and John Sinclair [3].

**Results**

The analysis reveals several key findings regarding the transition from lexemes to meaning:

First, lexemes function as minimal semantic units, but their meaning is context-dependent. For example, the lexeme *run* has multiple meanings depending on its syntactic environment (e.g., “run a company” vs. “run fast”) [5].

Second, word combinations are governed by syntactic rules that determine grammaticality. According to generative grammar, sentences are formed through hierarchical structures rather than linear combinations [6].

Third, collocation plays a crucial role in meaning construction. Certain words tend to co-occur more frequently than others, forming predictable patterns such as “strong tea” but not “powerful tea” [7].

Fourth, meaning emerges through interaction between syntax and semantics. The same words can produce different meanings depending on their arrangement, as seen in ambiguity (e.g., “old men and women”) [8]

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The relationship between lexemes and meaning construction represents one of the central issues in modern linguistics, bridging multiple theoretical traditions and methodological approaches. While earlier sections established that lexemes function as abstract units of meaning, this section expands the discussion by critically examining how meaning emerges through their interaction in real linguistic contexts. The analysis integrates structuralist, generative, corpus-based, and cognitive perspectives, demonstrating that meaning is neither fixed nor inherent in individual lexical items but is dynamically constructed through patterns of combination, usage, and interpretation.

From a structuralist perspective, the foundation of meaning lies in the relational nature of language. Ferdinand de Saussure’s distinction between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations provides a crucial framework for understanding how lexemes interact [1]. Paradigmatic relations refer to the set of possible substitutions a lexeme can have within a given context, while syntagmatic relations concern the linear combination of lexemes in actual usage. Meaning emerges from both axes simultaneously. For example, in the sentence “the dog barked,” the lexeme *dog* acquires meaning not only through its opposition to other animals such as *cat* or *wolf* (paradigmatic axis) but also through its syntactic position as the subject of the verb *barked* (syntagmatic axis). This dual relational system demonstrates that meaning is inherently dependent on structure rather than isolated lexical content.

Structuralism also emphasizes that linguistic signs are arbitrary, meaning there is no inherent connection between a word and its referent. However, once embedded in a system of differences and relations, lexemes gain functional meaning. This insight is particularly relevant when examining word combinations, as it suggests that meaning is not simply additive but configurational. In other words, the meaning of a phrase is not merely the sum of its parts but is shaped by the structural relationships between those parts.

Generative grammar, as developed by Noam Chomsky, shifts the focus from surface-level combinations to underlying syntactic structures [6]. According to this approach, language is governed by a set of innate grammatical rules that allow speakers to generate an infinite number of sentences. In this framework, word combinations are not random but are constrained by hierarchical structures such as phrase structure rules and transformations. For instance, the difference between “the boy saw the girl with a telescope” and its alternative interpretations illustrates how syntactic structure determines meaning. The ambiguity arises because the prepositional phrase “with a telescope” can attach either to the verb phrase or to the noun phrase, resulting in different interpretations.

This example highlights a key principle of generative grammar: meaning is closely tied to syntactic representation. The same sequence of lexemes can produce different meanings depending on their structural configuration. Therefore, understanding word combinations requires not only knowledge of lexical items but also an understanding of the rules that govern their arrangement. This perspective reinforces the idea that meaning is not inherent in lexemes themselves but emerges from their position within a structured system.

While generative grammar emphasizes rule-based competence, corpus linguistics introduces a usage-based perspective that focuses on actual language data. John Sinclair’s work on collocation and the idiom principle provides valuable insights into how meaning is constructed through frequent patterns of word combination [7]. According to Sinclair, speakers often rely on pre-constructed phrases and collocations rather than generating sentences from abstract rules each time. This observation challenges the traditional view of language as a purely generative system and highlights the importance of frequency and convention in shaping meaning.

Collocation, defined as the tendency of certain words to co-occur, plays a crucial role in meaning construction. For example, the phrase “strong tea” is acceptable in English, whereas “powerful tea” is not, despite both adjectives being semantically similar. This indicates that meaning is not solely determined by individual lexemes but also by established patterns of usage. Collocations often carry subtle semantic nuances that cannot be easily predicted from their components, demonstrating the importance of empirical data in linguistic analysis.

Furthermore, corpus-based studies reveal that many word combinations are semi-fixed or formulaic, blurring the distinction between grammar and lexicon. Expressions such as “make a decision” or “take into account” function as units of meaning that are stored and retrieved as wholes rather than constructed anew each time. This supports the idea that meaning is shaped by habitual usage and that linguistic competence includes knowledge of conventionalized patterns.

Cognitive linguistics offers another important perspective by emphasizing the role of human cognition in meaning construction. Unlike structuralism and generative grammar, which focus on formal properties of language, cognitive linguistics views language as an integral part of general cognitive processes [9]. According to this approach, meaning is grounded in conceptualization, and word combinations reflect how speakers organize and interpret their experiences.

One of the key concepts in cognitive linguistics is the idea of conceptual metaphor, as introduced by Lakoff and Johnson. Metaphors are not merely stylistic devices but fundamental mechanisms of thought that shape how we understand abstract concepts. For example, the expression “time is money” reflects a conceptual mapping between the domains of time and economic value. This metaphor influences a wide range of expressions, such as “spend time,” “waste time,” and “save time,” illustrating how word combinations encode deeper conceptual structures [9].

Another important concept is that of frames and schemas, which represent structured knowledge about particular domains of experience. Word combinations often evoke specific frames that guide interpretation. For instance, the phrase “buy a ticket” activates a commercial transaction frame involving a buyer, a seller, a product, and a payment. This demonstrates that meaning is not only derived from linguistic elements but also from background knowledge and cognitive structures.

Phraseology, the study of fixed expressions and idioms, further illustrates the complexity of meaning construction. Idiomatic expressions such as “kick the bucket” or “spill the beans” have meanings that cannot be inferred from their individual components [10]. These expressions are often culturally specific and require knowledge of shared conventions within a speech community. Their existence challenges compositional theories of meaning, which assume that the meaning of a whole can be derived from the meanings of its parts.

At the same time, phraseological units highlight the importance of conventionalization in language. Once a particular combination becomes established, its meaning becomes fixed and recognizable, even if it deviates from literal interpretation. This process demonstrates how meaning can evolve over time and become embedded in linguistic practice.

Ambiguity provides another important lens through which to examine word combinations. Structural ambiguity occurs when a sequence of lexemes can be interpreted in more than one way due to its syntactic structure [8]. For example, the phrase “old men and women” can mean either “old men and old women” or “old men and women of any age.” This ambiguity arises because of the way the adjective “old” interacts with the coordinated nouns. Such examples illustrate the intricate relationship between syntax and semantics and the role of context in disambiguation.

Lexical ambiguity, on the other hand, occurs when a single lexeme has multiple meanings. When combined with other words, the intended meaning is often determined by context. For example, the word *bank* can refer to a financial institution or the side of a river, and its meaning becomes clear only within a specific phrase or sentence. This further supports the argument that meaning is context-dependent and emerges through interaction rather than isolation.

Cross-linguistic evidence reinforces the universality of these principles while also highlighting variation across languages. Different languages exhibit distinct patterns of word combination, reflecting cultural, historical, and cognitive differences. For example, collocational preferences vary significantly between languages, making translation a complex task. A phrase that is natural in one language may sound unnatural or even incorrect in another due to differences in collocational norms [11].

Despite these differences, the fundamental principle that meaning arises from combinations rather than isolated units appears to be universal. All languages rely on structured patterns of word combination to convey meaning, suggesting that this phenomenon is rooted in the basic nature of human language and cognition.

In addition, functional approaches to linguistics, such as Halliday's systemic functional grammar, emphasize the role of context and communicative function in shaping word combinations [12]. According to this perspective, language is a resource for making meaning in social contexts, and word combinations are chosen based on their communicative purpose. This approach highlights the interaction between linguistic structure, meaning, and social context, further enriching our understanding of how lexemes combine to produce meaning.

### Conclusion

The study demonstrates that meaning in language is a dynamic and complex phenomenon that arises from the interaction of lexemes within structured combinations. While lexemes serve as the building blocks of language, their meaning is shaped by syntactic rules, collocational patterns, and contextual factors.

The findings highlight the importance of integrating multiple linguistic approaches—structural, generative, and cognitive—to fully understand how meaning is constructed. Word combinations are not merely grammatical arrangements but are central to communication, reflecting both linguistic structure and human cognition.

Future research may explore computational approaches to word combinations, particularly in natural language processing, where understanding collocation and context is essential for accurate language modeling.

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