An analysis on the semantic difference between English and Arabic

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Abstract

This study investigates some semantic differences that occur between English language and Arabic language. It differentiates between sets of related vocabulary showing how each language divides up particular fields of lexemes. The study centered on the theory of semantic fields since it describes words as related units of lexemes that are grouped in a particular way. In order to find any differences and/or similarities in using the same semantic fields across the two languages in a semantic way, componential analysis is used to break down the meaning of the words into several parts identified as semantic components. The research also focuses on the notion that a word doesn't have meaning on its own except in relation to other words or lexemes such as lexical sense relations which are classified into synonymy, antonym and hyponymy. This will be done by constructing two questionnaires in Arabic and English to conclude that the words of one language are classified in a way that is certainly different from the other language the research also determines that words that are clustered in one semantic field may share some aspects of meaning but not all. In this case this study deals with interrelated networks of structures rather than random lists of words.

الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في بعض الاختلافات في معاني الكلمات التي تحدث بين اللغة الإنجليزية واللغة العربية. الدراسة تفرق بين مجموعة من المفردات ذات الصلة ببعضها

البعض والتي تبين كيف تقسم كل لغة مجالات معينة من المعجم. تركزت الدراسة على نظرية المجالات الدلالية لأنها تصف الكلمات كوحدات مرتبطة من المعاني تم تجميعها بطريقة معينة. من أجل العثور على أي اختلافات و / أو أوجه التشابه في استخدام نفس المجالات الدلالية عبر اللغتين ، يتم استخدام التحليل المكوني لتقسيم معنى الكلمات إلى عدة أجزاء محددة على أنها مكونات الدلالية. يركز البحث أيضًا على فكرة أن الكلمة ليس لها معنى من تلقاء نفسها إلا فيما يتعلق بالكلمات الأخرى أو المعجمات مثل علاقات المعجم المصنفة في مرادف ، ومتضاد ، وقصص. وسيتم ذلك عن طريق بناء استبيانين باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية لاستنتاج أن كلمات اللغة الواحدة مصنفة بطريقة تختلف بالتأكيد عن اللغة الأخرى ، كما يحدد البحث أن الكلمات التي يتم تجميعها في مجال دلالي واحد قد تشترك في بعض الجوانب من المعنى ولكن ليس كل شيء. في هذه الحالة تتناول هذه الدراسة شبكات مترابطة من الهياكل بدلاً من قوائم عشوائية

1: Introduction

• **1.1-Background of Study:**

The research presented here aims to find some semantic differences that may occur between English and Arabic languages. The analysis in this work is focused upon distinguishing between the two languages in seven semantic fields. Analysis of the fields centered on the concepts of semantic field theory and componential analysis. 20 participants were required to answer the questionnaires (10 Arab and 10 English speakers) participated in the questionnaire to enable the researcher to gather words that are semantically related. This research therefore deals with systematic structures of interrelated words rather than random groups of different vocabulary.

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1.2- Reasons for undertaking the study :

A – Investigating the way in which Arabic and English languages divide up particular fields.

B- Showing the differences between related words in the same semantic field.

C- Explaining the concept that the words of one semantic field can share some   characteristics of meaning, but there is no word which shares all the aspects of the meaning of other words.

1.3- The aim of the study:

The objectives of this research are to determine whether the English and Arabic languages could defend the view of Meyer (2005)that "semantic field in one language is unlikely to correspond precisely to the meaning of the words covering the same field in another language, even when the speakers share similar cultures" (Meyer 2005: 154).

2- literature review:

It is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the way in which words or expressions are interpreted differently across languages. Semantics is the technical term used to study the meaning of words in all languages. It is therefore an important area in linguistics. Central to the entire discipline of semantics is the concept of Semantic Field Theory. This is one of the most widely used disciplines in linguistics and it describes a set of related

vocabulary. Thus, in this study Semantic Field Theory and componential analysis have major roles in showing that semantic differences between languages significantly affect the way people talk and also reflect their cultures.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in comparing languages. Most studies have found that each specific language carves up the world differently. For example, Habash (2010) compares Arabic and English languages semantically and reaches the conclusion that there are large number of homographs in the Arabic language, which results in Arabic having more ambiguous meanings than English. He also found that Arabic language distinguishes different features of meaning idiosyncratically. For example "the Arabic word قلمqalam is used for both 'pen' and 'pencil', yet the word صلاةslah is used for 'prayer' only in the worship (pray to) sense not the request (pray for) sense" (Habash 2010: 113).

2.1- Semantic Field Theory (SFT):

Studying meaning is one of the most complex and ambiguous fields in linguistics. Semanticists propose two main methods for studying meaning: the analytical (referential) approach, and the operational approach. "The analytical approach defines meaning by analyzing componential features of words, and the operational approach studies the words in usage" (Ullman 1972, in Al-Yahya, 2010: 23). The semantic field theory which was introduced by

Trier (1931) follows the analytical approach; it suggests that words cannot be isolated from other words, and there are always relationships among them such as 'sense relations'. Therefore, Semantic Field Theory "presents the lexicon as internally structured by paradigmatic semantic relations, especially synonym, contrast, and hyponym" (Murphy, 2006: 93). It is also the foundation of the collocation concept, "since collocated items are those which habitually co-occur with certain other items,

 e.g. 'flowers' collocate with 'bloom', 'letters' with 'writing'. These networks and collocations are built on sense relations in a language" (Syal 2007: 155).

Semantic Field Theory has been given two major divisions: paradigmatic fields and syntagmatic fields. According to Corson (1969: 31) "paradigmatic fields include words of the same form class that share semantic features (e.g. kitten and puppy). Syntagmatic fields include classes of word closely linked by usage, but never occurring in the same syntactic position (e.g. announce and microphone)". Thus, from Corson's (1969: 31) point of view, "words semantically related in any sense are said to belong to the same semantic field".

 However, Gliozzo and Strapparava (2009: 13) hold a different perspective. They consider that the basic assumption of Semantic Field Theory is that "the lexicon is structured into semantic fields: semantic relations among concepts belonging to the same field are very dense, while concepts belonging to different fields are

typically unrelated". For that reason, this study also tries to prove Channell's (1981: 117) claim that, by analyzing lexical items or vocabulary into fields, one will be no longer dealing with random lists of words, but with systematic structures.

Besides, Yang and Huaxin (2001: 51) state that Semantic Field Theory aims to find "the relationship between each individual word within a semantic set".   Many relationships exist between word meanings. The most widely used ones are synonymy ,hyponymy and antonym. As has been stated in the introduction, this study aims to find support for the claim that "words can be said to belong to the same semantic field when they share some aspects of meaning. At the same time they hardly ever share all aspects" (Channel, 1981: 117- 118). According to Jordan (1997) componential analysis (CA) is the best method for offering a systematic way of looking at the similarities and differences which occur between words in the same semantic field.

Accordingly, central to the entire discipline of Semantic Field Theory is the concept of Componential Analysis (CA).Lyons (1995) states that componential analysis is a method used to formalize and make precise the sense relationships among lexemes. This includes the analysis of the sense of a lexeme into its component parts (Lyons, 1995: 107). Words that share some aspects of meaning can be said to belong to the same semantic field. However, words rarely share all aspects of meaning. For example, "walk and run are similar in both being verbs describing

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ways in which animate beings with legs move, yet they differ in that run implies a different, usually faster, movement of legs than walk" (Channell, 1981: 118). Therefore, using componential analysis offers a systematic way of differentiating between related words in the same semantic field because "it consists, simply, of breaking down the meaning of a word or words into different pieces known as semantic components" (ibid). Thus, the relationship between Semantic Field Theory and componential analysis is that "the organization of words in a field can serve as basis for determining component" (Lehrer, 1975 in Yang and Huaxin, 2001: 52). The following example applies componential analysis by illustrating some components belonging to one semantic field, 'human'. The components are divided according to two semantic aspects, 'gender' and 'adulthood':

• Man= Human+ Adult +Male.

• Woman= Human+ Adult +Female.

• Boy= Human+ Child+ Male.

• Girl= Human+ Child+ Female.

As can be seen, this example supports the claim of Roey (1990: 28) that the componential analysis approach "is often used successfully to show meaning relations between semantically related words more systematically and economically, usually in the form of a matrix and using plus or minus signs". In fact, the semantic field 'human' is a kinship system and, according to Leonard (2009), most research on semantics deals with kinship

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relations as the most suitable subject for the study of componential analysis which examines the relationships between the members of a family. Leonard (2009: 108) also states that, by using componential analysis across languages, we can find that all cultures have kinship systems, "but they are not all organized along the same lines. There are a number of cultures in which the nuclear family of parents and children has no place".

It is claimed by Malmkjaer (2002) that Semantic Field Theory and componential analysis can also be used in contrastive analysis of different languages showing how different languages are subdivided in a given semantic area. Malmkjaer (2002: 340) stated that:

"Languages often differ even in apparently quite basic lexical divisions, and fields such as temperature terms, kinship terms, colour terms, parts of body and divisions of the animal and vegetable worlds will divide the semantic space differently and reflect this in the vocabulary items covering those fields"

However, this approach has some disadvantages; it could lead to one becoming unduly concerned with classification of lexemes and words represented in a language, forgetting about the language itself (Kreidler, 1998). Prasad (2008) has another perspective. He states that, although componential analysis cannot express the meaning of a word in an obvious way, and it can work successfully only where there is an apparent difference such as male vs. female, human vs. animal and married vs. unmarried, it does help us "to

bring out the logical features which are inherent in a word and thus exclude some meanings. For example, if we characterize (bachelor) as (+ male, - married), the meaning of (married) bachelor can be excluded" (Prasad, 2008: 146).

Componential analysis also helps to explain other meaning relations such as synonyms meaning inclusion and antonyms meaning exclusion. Inclusion is positively signed (+), and it is identified as synonyms in which the words of similar meaning are included. The meaning of exclusion is associated with the words of opposite meaning, 'antonym', and it is represented by negative marks (-)' (Prasad, 2008).   This can be clearly illustrated by the following example:

Man   + Human   +Adult   +Male   (Inclusive)

Woman   + Human   +Adult   - Male   (Exclusive)

Girl   + Human   - Adult   - Male (Exclusive)   (Prasad 2008: 146).

2.2- Introducing lexical semantic relations:

Accordingly, there are two different semantic relations between words: paradigmatic relations and syntagmatic relations. Paradigmatic relations, according to Hintikka (1994: 45), "capture the contrasts and affinities among word meanings", while syntagmatic relations "capture the semantic constraints on word combination" (ibid).   This research will focus on paradigmatic relations as inter-lexical sense relations that can be classified as synonymy, antonym and hyponymy. They suggest that

"The meaning of a word may depend on its associations with other words. Therefore, a word or lexeme has no meaning on its own except in associations with other words or lexemes in a sentence. The meaning shared by a word as a result of this relationship is the 'sense' of that word" (Yemisi, 2006: 757).

Murphy (2010: 6) claims that lexical semanticists study semantic relations such as paradigmatic relations for two reasons: first, semantic relations play major roles in logical relations among sentence meanings, such as entailment; second, they might tell us about how the mental lexicon is organized (Murphy, 2010: 109). Lexical semantic relations such as synonymy, hyponymy and antonymy are useful for achieving a coherent discourse. Using related words gives speakers more ability to describe the same things in different ways, to provide varied information, and avoid repetition in discourse (ibid). Furthermore, Murphy (2003) states that all definitions of lexical relations rely on the sense of the word showing similarity in words' feature specifications (for further explanation, see chapter 5, section 5.3). These relations will be discussed in more detail below with a consideration of the relationship between Semantic Field Theory and these semantic relations, starting with synonyms.

2.2.1- Synonyms:

In semantics, synonymy is considered an inter-lexical sense relation. It is "used to mean sameness of meaning" (Palmer, 1981:

88). The English language is full of synonyms according to Palmer (1981); this is due to the fact that its terms and expressions have been adopted from several different sources such as Anglo-Saxon, French, Latin and Greek.

It is worth mentioning at this point that synonyms can be identified by componential analysis, especially ''words that have identical componential features'' (Malmkjaer, 2002:340). Murphy (2010) states that synonyms occur between two words when they have a sense with identical feature specification. For instance, the sense of cow is synonymous with cattle.   However, most synonyms are maintained to have nearly but not exactly the same meaning. ''The moral of the synonym story is that it is very rare for two words to mean exactly the same thing'' (Murphy, 2010: 112). In Palmer's (1981) view, it is unlikely that two words with exactly the same meaning will both survive in a language. This fact is observed in all languages. Meyer (2005: 155) states that ''there are probably no two words in any language which are identical in meaning in all contexts''.   Accordingly, synonyms can be found in different characteristics. Yemisi (2006) argues that synonyms can be found as Cognitive, Descriptive or Near-synonyms. Cognitive synonyms 'are synonyms that are substitutable in any grammatically declarative sentence' (Evens, 1988, in Yemisi, 2006: 760). Yemisi (2006) offers several pairs of words which are, from a cognitive point of view, synonyms, such as seaman and sailor, mailman and postman, buy and purchase, hard and difficult.

Descriptive synonyms "are synonyms that are used connotatively to express the speakers' feelings towards what he or she describes" (Yemisi, 2006: 760). For example,

'Joba is <u>thrifty</u> and Joba is <u>economical.</u>

Jola is a <u>bachelor</u> and Jola is an <u>unmarried</u> man.

The orange is <u>sour</u> and the orange is <u>rotten</u>' (Yemisi, 2006)

All these underlined pairs are descriptively synonymous.

Therefore, Yemisi (2006) considers near-synonyms as words that could be similar, but do not have a truly identical meaning because of their variations in meaning. Some examples of English near-synonyms are mist and fog, stream and brook. "Brook is a small stream while stream is a small river. The same explanation could be offered for mist and fog. Fog is a thick cloud of water from the seashore or land, while mist is a thin fog" (Yemisi, 2006: 761).

2.2.2-Antonymy

Antonym is "the paradigmatic lexical relation between two lexemes that are opposite in meaning, such as big/ little, female/ male and down/ up" (Murphy and Koskela, 2010:16). There is also a significant relation between antonymy and senses of words. Murphy (2003: 86) states that antonym occurs among different pairs of senses. The antonymous senses are usually different in that they have all the same feature specifications except one. For

example, the sense of cow is antonymous to the sense of bull because they have the same values of all features except one, which is 'sex'.

 Furthermore, Hintikka (1994) points to the relation between antonym and field theory. He states that, since field theory concerns the relationship between words, the meaning of the word works in relation to other words that occupy the same conceptual terrain. For example "the meaning of 'hot' is determined, in part, in contrast to other terms in a gradable antonym, that is, in contrast to 'cold', 'warm' and 'cool' " (Hintikka, 1994: 41). This implies that antonyms have an advantage in helping Semantic Field Theory and componential analysis to discover new shades of a lexeme's meaning in relation to other lexemes. According to Kuyt (1995:19) "when the lexemes 'man' and 'woman' are analyzed by means of CA, we find that the difference between the two lexemes lies in the component MALE (= + MALE in man as opposed to -MALE in woman ".   Boy could also be called an antonym of man; in this case the antonym is found in the component ADULT.   To differentiate between the two antonyms of man, it is useful to use the term 'incompatibility' (meaning exclusion). Thus, "man is incompatible with woman in the component MALE and with boy in the component ADULT" (ibid).

However, most investigations of semantic oppositions have considered antonym to be as complicated as synonymy. Yang and Huaxin (2001) argue that antonym is not as simple as it looks.

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They show different shades of meanings between antonymous words. For instance, they consider the relationship between the antonymous man and woman as different from hot and cold; "in the man and woman relationship, the denial of one word means the assertion of the other. A person must be either a man or women as there is no third choice. But to say that something is not hot does not necessarily mean it is cold" (Yang and Huaxin, 2001: 51). This concept was originally supposed by Buren (1975) who says that antonym is a complicated lexical semantic relation because it consists of different relationships of meaning. He describes the antonymous relationship between man and woman as 'contradictories' and, while cold and hot have a 'contraries' relationship, "the difference is clearly due to the fact that a set of contradictories always consists of two members whereas a set of contraries have more than two members" (Buren, 1975: 131).

2.2.3- Hyponymy:

A hyponym, according to Finegan (2007: 181), is "a subordinate, specific term whose referent is included in the referent of a superordinate term". Consider the following example: the terms green, blue, red, black and white are hyponyms for the superordinate term colour. Hyponymy is found in almost all languages, but Finegan (2007) states that there are variations in the hyponymic relationships from one language to other. In a Polynesian language, the term ika(fish) is a hyponym referring not

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only to the animal that English speakers would recognize as a fish but also to creatures such as whales, dolphins and turtles.

Finegan (2007) also claims that, in semantic fields, a hyponym may appear in more than one level. A certain word may exist as a hyponym and as a superordinate term. The term 'blue', for instance, refers to different types and shades. Terms such as 'turquoise', 'royal blue' and 'aquamarine' are hyponyms of 'blue' while 'blue' itself is a hyponym of colour. "We thus have a hierarchy of terms related through hyponymic relationships" (Finegan, 2007: 182).

Jackson and Amvela (2000) state that hyponyms can be related to each other by hierarchical relations of generality or specificity; however, there are two different kinds of hierarchical relations. For example, the words 'tree' and 'oak' can refer to more specific designations of the object than tree. Similarly, a 'pain in the foot' and a 'pain in the toe' can refer to the same experience. In the case of tree and oak, the hierarchical relation is a 'kind of' relation, since an oak is a kind of tree. But in the case of foot and toe the hierarchical relation is a 'part of' relation, since a toe is a part of a foot.

3. Data Analysis

In the questionnaire, the participants gave a variety of terms for each word. This reflects the fact that each semantic field can be

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analyzed to produce many different components. The table (1) presents the semantic fields and their components as given by both Arab and English participants:

English			Arabic		
Semantic field	Components	Frequency	Semantic field	Components	Frequency
1.Attractiveness	pretty	10	attractivenessالجاذبية	جميل beautiful	10
	beautiful	10		وسيم handsome	9
	lovely	8		ملفت للنظر striking	6
	handsome	8		متميز distinct	5
	intelligent	5		خلاب charming	5
2.Victory	winning	10	انتصار Victory	فوزwinning	10
	achieve	7		نجاح success	8
	success	7		تقدم progress	7
	gain	5		الحرية freedom	4
	earn	5		كسبearn	4
					9

Category	English	No.	Arabic	Arabic/English	No.
3.Human	person	10	انسان	شخص individual	8
	human being	7	human	كائنbeing	7
	child	7		طفلchild	7
	adult	6		شاب adult	6
	male	5		ذكرmale	6
	female	5		انثى female	10
					9
4.Chair	Seat	10		مقعدbench	7
	stool	9		كرسي الحاكم throne	7
	arm chair	5		صالونsofa	
	sofa	4		كرسي بلا ظهر أو ذراعين stool	
5.Being surprised	surprise	10	مفاجأة	صدمةshock	
	shock	9	Being surprised	ذهل surprise	8
	astonish	6		دهشة astonish	5
	amaze	5		عجب wonder	5
					4
6.Cousinhood	Cousin	7	ابناء العمومة cousinhood	الخال ابن cousin (*)	8
				بنت الخال cousin	8
				ابن العم cousin	7
				بنت العم cousin	6

7.Animals	Cow& beef	10	الحيوانات	لحم cow& بقر cows meat	9
		9	Animals		
	Sheep &mutton	8		sheep غنم &لحم الغنم sheep meat	9
	Pig & pork	7		chicken دجاج &لحم الدجاج chicken meat	6
	Pig & ham			camel ابل &لحم الابل camel meat	

As can be seen from table 1 , no word occurs in isolation except 'cousin'. Most words share with other words some aspects of meaning. However, each word in a particular semantic field has no relation to the other sets of the other semantic fields. Also, each semantic field of the above fields has a cover term. This term is called a "cover word or superordinate word" (Yang and Huaxin, 2001: 50). The table shows the results of the questionnaire in which words are grouped into two separate languages (Arabic and English). The participants were asked to give some components for seven semantic fields which are covered by seven cover terms: attractiveness, victory, human, chair, being surprised, cousinhood and animals.

An interesting feature of the results of the questionnaire was that, although all the seven cover terms have the same meanings in both languages, most components given by the participants vary in their

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meaning, which means that most English components have different meanings from Arabic. All English components suggested for the semantic field 'attractiveness' are completely different from those suggested by Arabic speakers except the word 'beautiful' which was given by all 20 participants. The same situation in terms of providing different components also occurs in the semantic fields victory, chair, wish, cousinhood and animals However, a major similarity between the two groups of components is obvious in the fields human and being surprised.

It is noticeable from the above table that the similarities and differences of the components were caused by a number of relationships that exist between the semantic sets. The most frequent ones are synonyms and antonyms which will be discussed in more details later. According to the aim of this study to determine whether all lexemes in a semantic field have the same status, it was felt that it would be beneficial to look at similarities and/or differences that occur between each individual word within a semantic set. This can be achieved by Semantic Field Theory and componential analysis because "the theories of collocation, componential analysis and semantic field all offer a systematic framework for analyzing the vocabulary of a language" (Yang and Huaxin, 2001: 54)

4- Discussion:

To link the informants' answers , I intend to discuss three structural semantics: semantic fields, componential analysis and

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lexical relations (sense relations). This is in order to achieve the main aim of this study which investigates the accuracy of Meyer's (2005) claim that it is unlikely that a semantic field in one language will parallel precisely with the meanings of the words covering the same field in another language.

5- Conclusion:

The study of semantic fields can offer valuable insights into how lexemes can be classified according to their meanings. An attempt has been made in this work to explore some semantic differences that occur between the English and Arabic languages within the same field. The major concept that informs this work is Semantic Field Theory as it explains that words in a language are a scheme of interrelated networks or semantic fields. The main claim proved here is that it is unlikely for an English semantic field to be precisely equivalent to the meanings of words that cover the same field in the Arabic language. This conclusion is reached by looking at the features of each word in seven semantic fields through a componential analysis approach.

Through this study the researcher have tried to draw attention to the fact that every language divides its words up in different ways. In each language, words that share the same meanings can be grouped into fields, but these words differ in some aspects. This is because the term 'semantic field' relates meanings and senses of words instead of words as wholes. We can

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say, therefore, from the results of this study that it is apparent that the words of one language (such as English) are classified in certain ways that make them all exist in relation to the senses of other words, but they are definitely different from other languages (such as Arabic).

Obviously, this study provides valuable insights showing that the two languages are affected by certain lexical relationships that create significant differences between them. These relationships influence the way in which each language associates individual words within semantic sets. The most common ones focused on by this study are synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy relationships. As a result, we have seen how words in one language can be synonyms but not exactly identical, and how, in English, it is easier to distinguish between synonymous words than in Arabic. Antonym has been revealed in this study to be not as simple as it looks, since each antonymous word excludes the meaning of its pair from the context. Also, a hyponym can affect the languages as it refers to the word meaning inclusions. As a result, we can see that, in each society, lexemes are related to other lexemes on different semantic criteria which in turn can be analyzed in a way that differs from other societies.

In order to draw more substantial conclusions about the semantic differences between the English and Arabic languages, further data collection is required to determine exactly how word relations in a semantic field vary from language to language.

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