

## The Linguistic Essence of Synonymy and Graduonymy

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**Abstract.** *In linguistics synonymy and graduonymy are important, as they are crucial semantic relations in lexical systems. This article examines these semantic relations. Synonymy is a semantic relation which represents semantic similarity between lexical units, whilst graduonymy is a scale-based relation expressing degrees of meaning intensity. In this article descriptive and comparative methods are used to dedicate the distinguishing features and functional roles of these phenomena in language. From the analyzes in this article it is clear that most synonymous units differ in contextual or stylistic usage and because of this reason absolute synonymy is rare, while graduonymy allows for precise expression of semantic gradation. The findings from this article show a deeper understanding of lexical semantics and highlight the significance of synonymy and graduonymy in effective communication, language teaching, and lexicographical practice.*

**Keywords:** *Synonymy, Graduonymy, Lexical Semantics, Semantic Relations, Meaning Gradation, Vocabulary System*

### Introduction

In modern linguistics semantic relations among language units, specifically synonymy and graduonymy have significant importance in analyzing and understanding lexical-semantic system of a language. Languages continuously evolve and semantic relations among lexical units lie at the core of this process. Synonymy and graduonymy are primary means in ensuring the expressiveness of language, improving communicativeness and creating stylistic diversity of speech. Synonymy refers to the relationship between words that share similar or identical meanings, while graduonymy represents a set of words expressing the same concept with different degrees of intensity or quantity. The study of these phenomena is essential for understanding semantic nuances, lexical choice, and expressive richness in language. This essay aims to analyze the linguistic nature of synonymy and graduonymy and to highlight their functional and semantic characteristics.

Synonyms provide speakers with alternative lexical choices, however most synonyms differ in stylistic, contextual or emotional nuances, so it is important to be careful when choosing a word among synonyms. Graduonymy allows speakers to convey subtle semantic differences and contributes significantly to the expressiveness and stylistic variety of language.

### Materials and Method

In order to make analyzes in linguistic nature of synonymy and graduonymy within the lexical-semantic system of language a qualitative descriptive approach is employed in this study. The study is based on theoretical framework of lexical semantics, focusing on not formal or phonological properties but, meaning relations between lexical units. Data for this research were collected from explanatory dictionaries, thesauri, and academic works on semantics and lexicology. Lexical units exhibiting synonymous and gradonymic were collected to examine their semantic features and functional usage. To analyze and demonstrate gradational meaning, adjectives and adverbs were given particular attention, as they frequently express different degrees of quality in something. Several complementary

methods are applied in this study, they are semantic analysis, a comparative method, a contextual analysis and functional approach.

Semantic analysis was used to identify shared and differential meaning components among synonymous units. Second, a comparative method was employed to contrast synonymy and gradonymy in terms of substitutability, intensity, and contextual dependence. Third, a contextual analysis was conducted to observe how these lexical units function in different stylistic and communicative environments.

In addition, a functional approach was adopted to examine the role of synonymy and gradonymy in ensuring language expressiveness and creating stylistic variety in speech. Examples were analyzed to determine how lexical choice contributes to precision, emphasis, and nuance in communication. The analysis does not rely on quantitative measurement but rather on interpretative evaluation, which allows for a deeper understanding of semantic relations.

## Results

The results from analysis of lexical units show that synonymy and gradonymy are distinct but interrelated semantic phenomena in the lexical-semantic system. The findings revealed that synonymous units share a common denotative meaning, however, meanings distinguish in emotional-expressive value, stylistic coloring, contextual usage. For example from *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary* we can see two words referring to the feeling of illness. They are *illness* and *disease*, here are the definitions for these words: *Disease is used to talk about more severe physical medical problems, especially those that affect the organs. Illness is used to talk about both more severe and more minor medical problems, and those that affect mental health.*<sup>1</sup> Moreover, synonyms must be selected according to their pragmatic function. For instance, *child* and *kid*, they have the same denotation, but different pragmatic functions: *kid* for informal and *child* for formal contexts. In the Merriam-Webster dictionary we can see information about these two synonyms: *"In contemporary English, kid is neither slang nor improper. ... It is, however, most definitely informal, so those writing professionally or in a formal register might prefer to use child."*<sup>2</sup>

As synonyms are a group of words, which can help to avoid repetition in speech, they play a crucial role in linguistics, they also enrich expressive potential and ensure stylistic diversity in both written and spoken language.

When it comes to gradonymy, gradonymy is a semantic relation like synonymy, but they form ordered semantic chains rather than interchangeable sets. Gradonymic relations indicate gradual increase or decrease of specific quality, quantity or state. Each unit in a gradonymic series occupies a distinct position on a semantic scale, which prevents absolute substitution without altering the intended meaning. This confirms that gradonymy serves as a linguistic mechanism for precision and nuance in meaning representation. To express intensity and emphasis gradonymic choices play an important role. They help to express speech much more clear by their pragmatic function. For example: *warm-hot-scorching*. These words can have close meaning, they express the temperature of heat, however, the degree of this temperature vary, as there is an increase in their degree.

We can see a definition and an explanation for gradonymy given in Dirk Geeraerts's book on lexical semantics, *"Within lexical semantics, gradable adjectives form scales with intermediate values that reflect different degrees of the same quality; for example, warm, tepid, and cool can be seen as intermediate points on a scale defined by the polar adjectives hot and cold."*<sup>3</sup> From this expression it is clear that each unit in gradonymic series occupies a distinct position on a semantic scale, which prevents absolute substitution without altering the intended meaning. This confirms that gradonymy service as a linguistic mechanism for precision and nuance in meaning representation.

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Seventh edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. – 1780 p.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kid>

<sup>3</sup> Geeraerts, D. Theories of lexical semantics, Oxford university press - 2009.

## **Discussion**

From the findings it is clear that in lexical-semantic system synonymy and gradonymy have different, but still complementary roles. In synonymy there are multiple words with similar denotative meaning, which means synonymy has a lexical flexibility, while gradonymy provides semantic accuracy, as they distinguish differences along degrees of quantity, quality and intensity. These functions show that lexical system balances expressive richness and semantic accuracy. Moreover, in this study the importance of context and pragmatic functions of synonyms and gradonyms are determined by word choice.

The discussion of synonymy reveals that absolute synonymy is extremely rare, supporting the widely accepted view in linguistic theory that most synonymous relations are partial or context-dependent.

Gradonymy, by contrast, reflects the gradable nature of meaning and encodes varying degrees of a shared semantic feature. The results indicate that gradonymic relations form ordered semantic chains in which lexical units are arranged according to intensity, quantity, or quality.

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