

THE ARCHITECTONICS OF LEXICAL MEANING: SEMANTIC
TRANSFORMATIONS AND STRUCTURAL HIERARCHY IN THE RUSSIAN
LANGUAGE

Samiakhon Alimovna Shukurdzhanova

Senior Lecturer Department of Uzbek Language and
Literature Tashkent Pharmaceutical Institute

munisakhob@gmail.com

Abstract

This article offers a profound philological inquiry into the internal organization of the Russian word's semantic core. Moving beyond traditional descriptions, it explores the "architectonics" of lexical meanings—how they are constructed, layered, and transformed within the linguistic system. Based on the classical heritage of Academician V.V. Vinogradov and integrated with modern cognitive paradigms, the study examines the transition from rigid denotation to fluid connotation. The analysis focuses on the hierarchical dependencies between direct, figurative, and socially conditioned meanings that define the unique expressive power of the Russian Logos.

Keywords

philology, lexical architectonics, semantic derivation, polysemy, V.V. Vinogradov, linguistic worldview, connotation, semasiology, Russian studies.

Introduction The ontological essence of the Russian word resides in its multifaceted nature, representing a complex intersection of historical evolution, cultural memory, and cognitive processing. In the vast field of Slavic philology, the lexical meaning of a word is never viewed as a mere static label for an object; rather, it is a dynamic product of the human spirit's attempt to categorize and interpret the surrounding universe. The Russian language, with its remarkably rich morphological structure and centuries-old literary tradition, has developed a semantic system of extraordinary depth and hierarchical complexity. To explore the "architectonics" of lexical meaning is to engage in a profound decoding of the Russian mental landscape. This study is necessitated by the fact that in the era of rapid global linguistic shifts, the fundamental structures of meaning—as established by the great Russian semasiologists—provide the necessary stability for national identity. The urgency of this research is further highlighted by the shift in modern linguistics toward a more holistic, cognitive-centered view of the lexicon. We are no longer satisfied with simple dictionary definitions; we seek to understand the "life" of the word in its various functional states. How does a word move from a literal description of a household object to a high-level philosophical metaphor? What are the invisible threads that bind certain words together in unbreakable phraseological unions? By investigating these questions, we do not only map the types of meanings but also uncover the hidden mechanisms that allow the Russian language to remain one of the most expressive and nuanced instruments of human thought. This introduction serves as a gateway into a detailed structural analysis, aiming to bridge the gap between classical structuralism and modern functional linguistics, thereby providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the Russian Logos in all its multidimensional glory. The exploration of these meanings allows us to perceive the language not as a set of rules, but as a living cathedral of thought, where every stone every lexical unit—has its designated place and function in the overarching architectonic design [1, 8].



The structural foundation of the Russian lexical system is built upon the dialectical tension between the direct (nominative) and the figurative (derivative) sense. The direct meaning serves as the "semantic anchor," providing a stable reference to reality that is least dependent on the surrounding text; for instance, the word «дом» (house) fundamentally refers to a physical structure, yet it serves as the base for an entire cloud of secondary meanings that radiate from this core. However, the true philological richness of Russian is revealed in its transformative layers, where figurative meanings emerge through metaphor and metonymy, reflecting the associative power of the Russian mind. Metaphorical expansion in Russian is not just a stylistic ornament but a fundamental cognitive process, where physical properties are mapped onto abstract emotional or intellectual states, such as «железная воля» (iron will) or «холодный взгляд» (cold stare), where the tactile sensation of coldness is transferred to the psychological domain of human interaction [2, 9]. Metonymy, on the other hand, operates through spatial and temporal contiguity, allowing the language to achieve remarkable economy and depth, as seen in expressions where the container stands for the contained or the author for the work, such as «выпить целую чашку» or «читать Достоевского». Central to our understanding of this hierarchy is the seminal classification by V.V. Vinogradov, who differentiated meanings based on their degree of collocational freedom, creating a taxonomy that remains the cornerstone of modern semasiology. "Free" meanings possess a high degree of autonomy, limited only by logical compatibility, allowing the speaker to combine words in nearly infinite variations provided they adhere to basic reality. In contrast, "phraseologically bound" meanings are the most restrictive elements of the architectonics; they are semantically "imprisoned" within specific lexical pairs and cannot be substituted without destroying the meaning itself. A classic example is the word «закадычный» (bosom), which, in contemporary Russian, is inextricably linked to «друг» (friend), losing its meaning outside this specific union, or the word «разинуть» which is almost exclusively reserved for «пот» [4, 10]. Further complicating this structure are "syntactically conditioned" meanings, which represent a pinnacle of functional flexibility. In these instances, a word acquires a specific evaluative or qualitative sense only when it occupies a particular structural position, such as a predicate characterizing a person; this is how a concrete noun like «дуб» (oak) transcends its botanical origin to signify a stubborn or intellectually slow individual in a specific sentence structure [1, 11]. The architectonics is further layered by the degree of semantic motivation; non-derived roots form the primordial layer of the lexicon, while derived words exhibit a transparent "semantic history" through their morphemic composition. This derivational transparency allows the Russian speaker to perceive the internal logic of the language, where the meaning of «подснежник» (snowdrop) is instantly deciphered through its relationship with «снег» (snow) and the prepositional-suffixal framework that suggests "emerging from under the snow" [6, 12]. Moreover, we must consider the "constructively restricted" meanings, which require a specific grammatical construction or a certain prepositional case to reveal themselves, further proving that in Russian, lexis and grammar are two sides of the same coin. The philological analysis must also account for the connotative and expressive-synonymic layers, which provide the speaker with a vast spectrum of stylistic variations—from the high, archaic «чело» to the neutral «люб», each carrying a different social and historical weight. This layered connotation reflects the social and emotional hierarchy of Russian discourse, making the choice of a word a deliberate act of situating oneself within a specific cultural and communicative space [7, 13]. Modern research also points to the existence of "pragmatically conditioned" meanings, where the sense of a word is dictated by the immediate goals of the speaker and the situational context, often overriding traditional dictionary definitions. Thus, the lexical meaning in Russian is not a static point on a geometrical map but a multidimensional,



vibrating space where logic, emotion, history, and syntax intersect to create a living linguistic fabric that is both stable in its core and infinitely fluid in its periphery [14, 15].

In summarizing the intricate study of the Russian lexical architectonics, it becomes evident that the word is a pulsating organism, far removed from the cold rigidity of a dictionary entry. The exploration of semantic types—ranging from the unshakeable direct nominative sense to the most delicate and elusive figurative extensions—reveals a linguistic system that is both mathematically precise and artistically boundless. The theoretical framework established by Academician V.V. Vinogradov has stood the test of time, proving that the Russian language is built upon a foundation of logical dependencies that nevertheless allow for infinite creative freedom. This research underscores that the hierarchy of meanings is not merely a linguistic convenience but a reflection of the Russian people's historical journey and their unique way of perceiving the world. By expanding our understanding of phraseological bonds and syntactically conditioned nuances, we gain a more sophisticated tool for the interpretation of Russian literature, where every word choice is a deliberate stroke in a larger semantic masterpiece. Furthermore, the findings of this article emphasize that the "expressive-synonymic" wealth of Russian is its greatest cultural treasure, allowing for a level of precision in emotional communication that few other languages can match. As we move further into the digital age, where language often risks becoming oversimplified or "flattened," the preservation and study of these deep semantic layers become a vital act of cultural protection. The architectonics of meaning serves as a shield against the erosion of nuance, ensuring that the "Russian Logos" continues to resonate with clarity and power. Ultimately, this philological inquiry serves as a reminder that to speak Russian is to participate in a grand, multi-layered tradition of sense-making, where every syllable carries the weight of history and the spark of future potential. The systematic study of lexical meanings, therefore, remains a cornerstone of Slavic studies, offering endless opportunities for future scholars to peel back the layers of the profound and beautiful Russian word.

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