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Midonymy: A Lexical Relation in Need of Two Extremes

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Recived: 12/8/2022, Accepted: 25/8/2022, Online Published: 31/8/2022

Abstract

Lexical relations are important from the point of view of different fields as they are one of the tools that are used in formulating their theories and perspectives. Thus, whenever the list of lexical relations becomes more comprehensive, the theories and perspectives become more thorough. The current research is a try to add and coin a new lexical relation which is called *midonymy*. This lexical relation refers to a lexical item (midonym) that lies in the middle between two extremes such as the midonym warm which lies between the pair of extremes hot and cold. When one is asked about the meaning of the midonym B, the answer can be It is something between A and C. Midonyms can vary according to the nature of the midonym itself or according to its relation with the two extremes that surround it. Midonyms can be classified into: mixing, verbal, absolute-relative, transitive-intransitive and mutual-exclusive midonyms. The pair of extremes should surround each midonym and a midonym cannot be a midonym if one or both of them is/are missed, that's why the title of this research shows that midonymy is in need of two extremes. The extremes also vary according to their nature into: antonymous extremes, sequential extremes, orientational extremes, hyponymous extremes and superiority of extremes. Concerning the terminology, the linguistic concept is midonymy, the noun that refers to the one element related to this lexical relation is midonym, and the adjective is midonymous which means something related to or a type of midonymy.

<u>Keywords:</u> midonymy, extremes, lexical relation, sense relation.

المتوسط الدلالي: علاقة دلالية تتطلب طرفين

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الملخص: تعتبر العلاقات الدلالية ذات اهمية من وجهة نظر حقول علمية مختلفة وذلك لانها تستخدم في صياغة نظرياتها ومنظورها. ولذلك فكلما ازدادت العلاقات الدلالية واصبحت اكثر شمولية، ادى ذلك الى جعل هذه النظريات ووجهات النظر اكثر عمقا. يحاول البحث الحالي اضافة وصياغة علاقة دلالية جديدة تدعى المتوسط الدلالي (Midonymy). تشير هذه العلاقة الدلالية الى مفردة (المتوسط الدلالي) والتي تقع وسطا بين طرفين ومثال ذلك المتوسط الدلالي (دافئ) والذي يقع بين زوجين من الاطراف وهما (حار) و (بارد). عندما يُسأل احدهم عن معنى المتوسط الدلالي (ب) ، فإن الإجابة ستكون أنه شيء يقع بين (أ) و (ج). قد يتنوع المتوسط الدلالي طبقا لطبيعته أو طبيعة علاقته مع الطرفين الذين يحيطان به. يمكن تصنيف المتوسط الدلالي الى: مزيجي وفعلي وثابت—نسبي ومتعدي—لازم ومشترك—حصري. يتوجب أن يتوفر المرفين الذين يحيطان بالمتوسط اللفظي وبخلافه لا يمكن اعتبار اللفظ متوسطا لفظيا في حال غياب أحد الطرفين أو كلاهما وهذا ذكر في عنوان البحث أن هذه العلاقة تتطلب طرفين. يمكن المتوسط للطرفين أن يتنوعا بحسب طبيعتهما الى: متضادين أو متسلسلين أو اتجاهيين أو هايبونيميين أو استعلائين.

الكلمات الدالة: منتصف الاسم، المتطرفين، العلاقة المعجمية، علاقة المعنى.

1. Introduction

Semantic, sense or lexical relation among words is considered as one of the notions that raises the interest of various fields such as philosophy, cognitive psychology, computer science, literary theories, cognitive neuroscience, psychoanalysis, and investigations from any field which are interested in words, meaning and the mind. These are different fields whose approaches are different but all of them utilize semantic relations as one of the important tools to formulate their theories. This denotes the importance of lexical relations, and each time the list of these relations becomes more comprehensive, more accurate theories will result (Murphy, 2003:4).

Meaning is the main concern of semantics. It can be studied in various ways under semantics. The first way is called *lexical semantics* which studies meaning of isolated words without relating the words with other ones. The second way is called *sentence semantics* that is interested in the meaning of words in the level of sentence to show the relationship that holds among the parts of the sentence. The last way is *discourse semantics* which is concerned with the meaning of extended discourse and the relationships among the utterances (Briton, 2000:129). The current study is related to the first way as it intends to study the relationship among lexical items in a language.

Lexical relations are of two types: they are either paradigmatic or syntagmatic. Paradigmatic relation (to which the current study is related) are relevant to the items that can have the same position in grammatical structure, for example: "I saw a bird/sparrow (hyponymy); I saw a crow/sparrow (incompatibility); a long/short journey (antonymy); she touched Pete's arm/elbow (meronymy)." Syntagmatic lexical relations hold between items in the same grammatical structure (Cruse, 2006:163-164).

Lexical items are considered as containers of meaning and they, in addition, fulfil relationships with each other for different reasons. When one intends to explain the meaning of a lexical item, s/he can explain it according to its relationship with other lexical items and each has its own perspective. For example, 'conceal' is described as 'the same as hide'; 'shallow' as 'the opposite of deep'; 'daffodil' as 'a kind of flower', etc. These relations represent synonymy, antonymy and hyponymy respectively. The characterization of this kind depends on the basis of the relationship between lexical items with other ones, not on the component features of them (Yule, 2006:104).

What is mentioned above shows the importance of the field of lexical relations and that whenever the list of lexical relations becomes more completed, more accurate and comprehensive theories and perspectives will result. Thus, in addition to the list of lexical relations that is available now such as synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, homonymy, homophony, homography, polysemy, troponymy and metonymy, the current paper is a try to add a new lexical relation which is midonymy. The suggested lexical relation cannot be studied in isolation of or apart from other lexical relations as it depends on some of them in a way or another in addition to other linguistic components as it will be shown in the next sections. The current research does not imply a section about Methodology of the Research as it is a theoretical one which intends to coin a new linguistic component and this is done be defining the concept of midonymy, giving the classifications of extremes that should accompany the midonyms and presenting an account about the types of midonyms.

2. Midonymy

The term *midonymy* is coined of the noun 'mid' which means 'being the part in the middle (something) occupying a middle position" (Meriam-Webster, 2022), and the suffix '-onymy' which is "used to form nouns describing the study, formation, or use of words or names" (http://en.www.wiktionary.org/wiki/-onymy); and this suffix is used to form a number of other lexical items lexical relations such as synonymy and antonymy. Also, it is used to form other terms that are related to the fields of study such as toponymy, paronymy, retronymy, etc.

The term *midonymy* refers to a lexical relation that denotes a lexical item which lies in the middle between two extremes to which it has a relationship, and explaining a midonym or answering the question "What is the meaning of an item is considered as a midonym?" can be answered as "an item that lies between extreme 1 and extreme 2". For example, the lexical item 'warm' is a midonym that lies between the extremes 'cold' and 'hot', 'medium size' is a midonym between 'small' and 'large', the number (5) is a midonym between (4) and (6). As a linguistic concept, it is called *midonymy*, the one item of it is called *midonym* and the adjective derived from it is *midonymous* which describes that an item is related or a type of *midonymy*. To be a midonym, two extremes should be available to be in the middle between them, i.e., if one or both extremes are missed, the item is not a midonym anymore. Extreme (according to Merriam-Webster, 2022) means something situated at or marking one end or the other of a range.

3. Classifications of Extremes

The extremes between which a midonym lies are classified according to different criteria as follows:

3.1. Antonymous Extremes

Shaw (1986:492) defines antonymy as "pairs of words that have opposite or negative meanings: man-woman, man-boy, human-beast, mortal-God, holy-unholy, etc." This means that the extremes to which the midonym belongs opposite each other and the midonym lies between them. For example, 'easy' and 'hard' are two antonymous extremes as they opposite each other and 'moderate' is a midonym between them, 'white' and 'black' are also of this type and 'grey' is m midonym between them, and many other pairs are relevant to this category such as the following list: big-medium-small, right-middle-left, alive-dying-dead, etc.

It is worth mentioning that not all antonyms have midonyms, some of them do not include midonyms such as: husband-wife, increase-decrease, inside-outside, even-odd, etc.

3.2. Sequential Extremes

This type is related to extremes which are relevant to events, actions, numbers, etc. that have a particular order. There are different extremes that related to this type such as cardinal and ordinal numbers, the names of days, months and seasons, the stages of age, etc. Because these extremes appear in a sequence, the midonym may have a prior extreme which has a lower degree or stage, and a subsequent extreme which has a higher degree or stage. For example, the stages of study include: kindergarten, primary school, intermediate school, secondary school, college or university, etc. When one is asked about the meaning of intermediate school, s/he may consider it as a midonym and the answer will be: "It is a stage between primary and secondary school." Of course, the primary school has a lower rank; and the secondary school has a higher rank. The intermediate school lies between them.

Some sequential extremes have an order or sequence but they don't have the property of being lower or higher as they are just related to priority and subsequence in order. For example, the days of the week have a sequence in which one can say that 'Monday' is midonym between 'Sunday' and 'Tuesday'. Thus, Sunday comes before and Tuesday comes after but all of them have the same rank and it cannot be said that any of these days has a higher or lower degree or rank compared with the other extreme and the midonym.

Depending on the nature of the extremes in this type, one can notice that some of them have limits in which there is a member that is the first in the sequence and another member that is the last in the sequence. For example, January is the first month of the year and December is the last one. Here, the first and last members cannot be midonyms because they miss one extreme and missing one extreme means that the member cannot be a midonym as it is mentioned above. Whereas some other extremes do not have such limits because they are related to a non-finite sequence such as the ordinal and cardinal numbers because the nature of numbers does not allow to determine a number that is considered the last or the greatest one.

3.3. Orientational Extremes

There are different kinds of orientations and usually they are related to pairs such as: right-left, front-back, east-west, north-south, etc. With these orientations, there is always a midonym that occupies the central position which either represents the position of the speaker in which s/he exists or the position of the entity which the speaker talks about.

Such extremes are considered as two pales that may be far from each other because each of them lies in the very other opposite side. Also, such extremes may be relevant to orientations that are close to each other. For example, the north with east or west represents two pairs of extremes and this is also true with south and east or west. In this type, the midonym does not occupy the central position; it is here an orientation also which exists between these primary orientations. For example, north-east is a midonym lying between north and east extremes, and this can be applied to the other orientations as it is shown in figure (1) below:

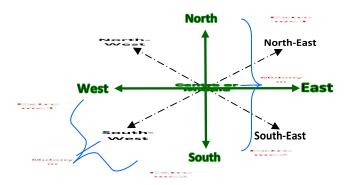
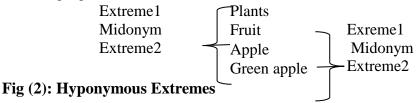


Fig (1): Orientational Extremes

3.4. Hyponymous Extremes

Saeed (2009:69) indicates that "hyponymy is a relation of inclusion. A hyponym includes the meaning of a more general word, e.g. 'dog' and 'cat' are hyponyms of 'animal'. The more general term is called super ordinate or hypernym."

Usually, the relation of inclusion has several levels of inclusion. The highest superordinate concepts include more than one hyponym which are called co-hyponyms such as 'pulse' and 'tuber' which are co-hyponyms of 'vegetables' and equally 'bean' and 'pea' are co-hyponyms of 'pulse' (Cowie, 2009:41). Thus, the superordinate includes hyponyms and usually each of these hyponyms includes, in turn, a number of other hyponyms. So, this hyponym becomes a superordinate for the concepts that it includes. This process may continue to include several levels of inclusion. In this case, any concept that is included in a superordinate and it includes (an)other concept(s) is considered as a midonym because it occupies a level that lies in the middle between the two hyponymous extremes. For example, 'fruit' is hyponym of the superordinate 'plants' and 'fruit' is also a superordinate of 'apple' as 'apple' is included in the meaning of fruit. Then, 'plant' and 'apple' are hyponymous extremes for the midonym 'fruit' as it occupies a level between these two extremes. This can be clarified in the following figure:



3.5. Superior and Inferior Extremes

There are two types of extremes concerning superiority. The first one is related to the extremes that one of them is considered as superior in comparison with the other extreme which is considered inferior and the midonym here occupies a moderate level between them. For example, good-bad, high-low, success-failure, strong-weak, brave-

coward, generous-stingy, etc. are all pairs of extremes in which the first of each pair is the superior and the second is the inferior between which the midonyms lie.

The other type of extremes in terms of superiority is the non-superiority one which is related to the pairs of extremes that have similar ranks, i.e., it cannot be said that one of these extremes is superior and the other is inferior. The relation between these extremes is a non-superiority one and which can be given the term 'complementary extremes' as the extremes with the midonyms have a relation of complementing each other but still they have a kind of order which depends on specific criteria other than superiority. For example, the pairs left-right, north-south, east-west, child-adult, etc. are all related to this type. Here, it cannot be said that the first element of each is better or superior compared with the second element of each pair.

4. Classifications of Midonyms

Midonyms can be classified according to five criteria as follows:

4.1. Mixing Midonymy

This type of midonymy results from mixing the two extremes to have an element that may carry apparent features of both extremes. For example, 'warm' is a mixing midonym between 'cold' and 'hot' extremes, and this midonym carries features of both extremes though it differs from both. When water is warm, it is not hot to the extent that makes it untouchable nor it is cold that makes it, for example, difficult to be used in cold weather but still it carries apparent features of cold and hot and it is hard even for ordinary people that warm water may result from mixing cold and hot water. The other type of midonymy may carry features that make it distinct from the features of its extremes and only specialists may know that it is mixture of these extremes. For example, 'green' is a mixing midonym because it results from mixing 'blue' with 'yellow' colours but still it is seen as a distinct colour that is unlike its extremes which can be seen in the following figure:



Fig (3): Mixing Extremes

4.2. Verbal or Transitional Midonymy

In this type, the midonym is a verb. The verbs relevant to this type are called 'Transitional Verbs' by Quirk and Greenbaum (1973:47) such as: arrive, die, fall, land, leave, lose, etc. When these verbs occur in the progressive or continuous tense, their meanings denote the beginning or inception which means the approach to the transition.

Verbal midonym means that an entity is in a middle state between two extremes departing the state of the first extreme and still in a transitional phase which cannot be considered as related to the other extreme but moving or approaching to it as the current state makes this expected. For example, when it is said "He is dying", it means that this person is still alive but the current state of the person denotes that he is going to die such as when the person suffers of deadly accident or disease. In this case, 'be dying' is a verbal midonym that is between life and death. The verb 'land', when it is used in progressive, also denotes that the airplane is approaching to the land, i.e., it is still flying but it is slowing down and moving towards the land. Thus, it is in a state between flying and being on the ground of the airport.

4.3. Absolute and Relative Midonymy

Absolute midonym refers to this one which has restricted boundaries that make it distinct from its extremes, for example: the number (4) is a midonym that lies between the extremes (3) and (4). This midonym has its own status that is considered distinct from other numbers. Such kind does not imply shared areas with its extremes. Also, this can be applied to the names of the days and months. For example, when it said that 'Wednesday' is a midonym between 'Tuesday' and 'Thursday', it means that it is in the middle between these two days because this is the common order of the days and nothing else, i.e., 'Wednesday' is separate from other days of the week, it is not a result of mixing two days nor it has features of its extremes. Thus, when it becomes 12 O'clock Am, it means that we leave Tuesday and become completely in Wednesday and every week there is a day which is called Wednesday without having the property of being "*more or less Wednesday than the Wednesday in other weeks."

Relative midonym allows having variety of degrees within the range of being between its extremes. For example, 'warmth' is a midonym between the 'coldness' and 'hotness' but being warm does not mean having a specific degree that is true with everything warm. It ranges, for example, from 30° and 60° when it is about the temperature of the water. So, warmth here is not related to a specific degree. Also, relativity may result from the situation in which this midonym is used. For example, the degrees of warmth above are uttered to refer to the warmth of water that one drinks but if one talks about warmth of the room temperature, the warmth degree ranges, almost, from 21° to 26° because higher degrees are considered hot and lower ones are considered cold.

4.4. Transitive and Intransitive Midonymy

Transitivity is a linguistic term used in various fields for various meanings. In grammar, it means whether the verb is followed by (an) object(s) to be transitive or not followed by any to be intransitive (Leech, 2006:114-115). This term is also used in lexical relation to compare between hyponymy which is said to be always transitive and meronymy which is considered almost always intransitive. 'Kestrel' is hyponym of 'hawk' and also 'hawk' is a hyponym of 'bird'. One can say that kestrel is a hyponym of bird directly jumping the in-between level and this is the transitivity of hyponymy. Meronymy is usually intransitive as one can say that 'nail' is meronym of 'finger', i.e., it is part of it but it is unusual to say that 'nail' is a part of hand although the figure is a part of the hand which means that the level of finger cannot be jumped as it happens with hyponymy (Ramband, 2012:128-130).

Transitivity in midonymy refers to something different. A midonym is said to be transitive when it accepts to be an extreme for one of its extremes when it was a midonym. For example, the XL size is midonym when it lies between the extremes L and XXL; and XL can be an extreme for L size when one talks about L size as one that lies between M and XL. This can also be applied to numbers, days of the week, months, etc.

Intransitive midonymy is related to the midonym that lies between two extremes which do not have extra extremes that can come after or before them. For example, the verbal midonym 'be dying' is intransitive because this midonym lies between the extremes 'life' and 'death' and here neither 'life' nor 'death' can be midonyms to other extremes as they lie at the most extreme ends.

4.5. Mutual and Exclusive Midonymy

Mutual midonym is that one which is shared by different pairs of extremes and usually this type is related to lexical items that carry the meaning of being in the middle or having a medium degree of something. For example, the word 'middle' can be a midonym of different pairs of extremes such as: north-south, east-west, up-down, beginning-end, etc. Also, 'moderate' can be a midonym of cheap-expensive, calmloud, easy-difficult, etc.

Exclusive midonym is specific to one pair of extremes and it cannot be used as a midonym with any other pairs as a midonym. For example, number (8) is a midonym between (7) and (9), Monday is between the pair Sunday and Tuesday and February is a midonym between January and March.

5. Conclusions

It can be concluded that:

- 1- Midonymy is a lexical relation which refers to a lexical item (midonym) that lies in the middle between two extremes.
- 2- Midonyms can vary according to the nature of the midonym itself or according to its relation with the two extremes that surround it.
- 3- Midonyms can be classified into: mixing, verbal, absolute-relative, transitive-intransitive and mutual-exclusive midonyms.
- 4- The pair of extremes should surround each midonym and a midonym cannot be a midonym if one or both of them is/are missed.
- 5- The extremes vary according to their nature into: antonymous extremes, sequential extremes, orientational extremes, hyponymous extremes and superiority of extremes.

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