# Comparative Analysis of Semantic Distinctions between Synonymous Adjectives in Tatar and English

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***Abstract****:*

*Many linguistic researches are devoted to the issues of defining the valid criteria of emergence and preservation of semantically synonymous relations between words, the conditions of their system-based organization in a synonymic row.*

*The aim of the paper is to indicate and analyze the types of semantic distinctions between synonymous adjectives in Tatar and English, thus determine features common for the two non-related languages. Based on the broad review of the theoretical data it is stated in the paper that a synonymic row represents a specific type of word relations based on the sameness/ similarity of meaning and distinction.*

*The distinctions which bear semantic, expressive and stylistic nuances, that serve to preserve gradation inside a synonymic row, are called shades of meaning. The comparative analysis of the examined data let us identify types of semantic distinctions in gradation, motivating circumstances, duration and frequency, nature of outward expression of the quality, range of described objects, semantic associations, evaluative attitude, logical emphasis, emotional coloring.*

*We believe the paper findings may be useful for researchers who deal with contrastive linguistics, typology of non-related languages, lexicographic practice and may help those who study the English language to solve the difficulty of choosing the appropriate word in the communication discourse.*

***Keywords:*** *Linguistics, Language education, Semantics, Comparative analysis, Synonyms.*

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## 1. Introduction

Lexical synonymy has always been the focus of linguistic researches. There are numerous works on synonymy which were carried out both by English and Tatar linguists. In English as Noyes points out, "the evolution of English synonymy … stems immediately from the French" (Noyes, 1951) and is connected with the work of Trusler "Difference between words esteemed synonymous in the English language" (1766). In Tatar, synonymy was one of the slowly developing aspects of lexicology. It made its appearance in 1895 with Kayum Nasyiri's well-known work "Lahjai Tatari" in which he esteemed synonymous the words from the Tatar, Arab, Persian, Turkish and Russian languages.

The first authoritative work in the field of lexical synonymy in the Tatar language belongs to Shifa Hanbikova (1980). Her original efforts found reflection in the work "The Tatar Synonymy and Dictionaries". Hanbikova offered the treatment of synonymy in the framework of history, word-building and semasiology; indicated the relevant principles of a dictionary compilation. As a result, the first and only Dictionary of Tatar Synonyms appeared in 1999 edited by Hanbikova and Safiullina (1999).

Thus, despite the long history of evolution and abundance of researches devoted to synonymy, there are still controversies over the valid definition and criteria of synonymy, the conditions of organizing the words into a synonymic row, the principles of studying synonymy in separate word classes. Moreover, in Tatar linguistic science extremely little attention is given to synonymy in recent years, the research works are conducted on the fragmentary basis and in one language platform. Almost no comparative analysis based works appear, the results of which could be included into bilingual dictionaries of synonyms.

The present study is an endeavor to demonstrate on a modest but essential language material the semantic differences between Tatar synonymous adjectives in contrast with their English counterparts. Thus, it could contribute to deeper understanding of the semantic variety of adjectives in the Tatar and English languages. Another reason is that it would greatly benefit the language learners or translators and would be a definite improvement over their choice of the correct word in English.

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1. Research objectives
To carry out the comparative study of semantic differences between synonymous adjectives in Tatar and English we stated the following objectives:

- to review the existing works devoted to the research topic and analyze the main approaches to studying synonymy in English and Tatar linguistics;

- using continuous sampling method, to collect the body of synonymous adjectives from Tatar lexicographic sources and determine their counterparts in the English language;
- to study the semantic structures of the Tatar and English synonymic rows, indicate the common and differential semantic properties of synonyms;
- to work out the typology of semantic differences between synonymous adjectives in Tatar and English in lexicological framework.

### 2.2. Theoretical and empirical methods

Our research is based on the following key methods:

- theoretical methods of analysis and synthesis, including the analysis of the theoretical literature devoted to the research problem and generating the reviewed linguistic knowledge into the relevant research approach;
- empirical methods including linguistic observation and selection of research data, which was examined in the light of comparative analysis.

### 2.3. Body of Data

The body of data comprises 497 Tatar and English synonymous adjectives which were collected from the Dictionary of Synonyms by Hanbikova and Safiullina (1999), Oxford Learner's Thesaurus: A Dictionary of Synonyms, Oxford Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms, New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus, English-Russian dictionary of synonyms by Apresyan (1995). As we focus our attention on synonymy as sense-synonymy, the Tatar and English monolingual glossaries were examined, that is Explanatory Dictionary of the Tatar Language (1977-1981), Explanatory Dictionary of the Tatar Language (Ganiyev, 2005) Longman Exams Dictionary (2006), Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2009) and Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Similarity vs. Difference

Synonymy as one of the types of relations between words is based on similarity and distinction. Hence, two or more words could be called synonymous due to the proximity or sameness of meaning, but expressing different characteristics of one concept.

The comprehensive review of the works on the issues of synonymy allowed us to reduce the existing viewpoints into two main points:

- synonyms are words identical in their lexical meaning and interchangeable in certain contexts, which are strictly interrelated with each other. However, such a definition of synonym brings to the forefront only the general understanding of synonymous words; the distinguishing features of each synonym turn out to be of little significance;

- synonyms are words close in their lexical meaning, but differing with shades of meaning or expressive and stylistic features. Thus, Rakhmanov points out semantic, stylistic and grammatical distinctions between synonyms (Rakhmanov, 1961). Safiullina indicates four main aspects which make synonyms different from each other: shades of meaning, emotional and expressive coloring, morphological structure and frequency of use in active speech (Safiullina, 1999). The disadvantage of such an approach to synonymy is that it denies the existence of absolute synonyms and is focused more on distinction than on similarity of meaning.

In this case we share Yevgenyeva's definition of synonyms as words possessing similar or same meaning, characterized by different shades of meaning, emotional coloring and stylistic characteristics or differing from each other by all these features simultaneously.

A synonymic row, being the system-based organization of words, enables to describe each concept in all the variety of its characteristics. The presence of a distinctive characteristic is an essential pre-requisite for including the word in a synonymic row. Such a synonymic row is marked by "a range of variation" starting from a dominant word with the closest synonyms to the ones with the greatest distinction. "Unclosed synonymic row is a way of the development of a language, the evolution of a language" (Bragina, 1979).

However, a debatable question arises about what it is more important in defining the synonymy of words in language: similarity or distinction in meaning. As aforementioned, many contemporary scientists support the sameness of meaning as the key principle of uniting the words in a synonymic row. Most Tatar linguists also recognize "sameness" as the main selection criterion of synonyms that goes under the titles as commonness or closeness of meaning: "synonyms express a common meaning. …Synonymous relationships are based on how close the words on their meanings (Hanbikova, 1980); "A set of words denoting the same or close meaning is called a synonymic row" (Safiullina, 2002).

Thus "sameness" isn't understood as naive "equality" or absolute coincidence of semantic structures of words. Otherwise it would be pointless to speak about the existence of synonyms in language. Being one of the types of relations of words in a lexico-semantic group, synonymy demonstrates the correlation of similarity and distinction. Other scientists point out the dialectic unity of sameness and distinction. "Each meaning-bearing verbal sign like an atom possesses two charges in itself: positive (identifying, common) and negative (differentiating, distinct)" (Ufimtseva, 1980). Therefore, it would be rational to consider "sameness" as "unity in diversity" (Bragina, 1979).

While analyzing the similarity of semantic structures of lexemes we may come to a general point that the basis of sameness distinguishes the character and frames of distinctions of the synonymous lexical units, indicates their linguistic nature. The

possession of the common and distinct features within the borders of this semantic sameness is one of brightest models of the system organization of language. A synonymic row demonstrates internal language similarities, that is, the words denoting one and the same concept aren't semantically equal to each other; their semantic structures are different from the one of a dominant word or other members of the synonymic row.

It would be right to assume that distinctive features of each synonym is of great significance and stands out as a necessary basis supporting the existence of synonyms in language. Bragina (1979) states that "powers of the language themselves supply the distinctive shades of meaning of each synonym; the very shades of meaning preserve gradation in a synonymic row, that evades any semantic, expressive and stylistic neutralization, mixture of different forms of language expression".

### 3.2. Shades of meaning

The issue of shades of meaning is inseparably linked with such notions as word and word meaning. Not all researchers, who support the traditional approach to the issue, offer the ways of addressing this terminological uncertainty. Thus, according to Alexandrov, synonymy should be determined with the help of the term sememe which is understood by him as a combination of the expressed concept and additional (stylistic, emotional, etc.) characteristics. Referring to the idea of a language context as an aspect defining a word meaning in the syntagmatic chain, the scientist suggests that since "in practical terms, words are used in a context, it is appropriate to consider synonyms not as lexemes, but as sememes" (Alexandrov, 1967). Other supporters of the traditional theory in definitions of synonymy keep on using such synonymous terms as "lexeme", "word", "word meaning" and "lexico-semantic variant".

In our research, we call a word an essential structural-semantic unit of a language, that appeared in the course of communication and serves to represent objects and their properties, other phenomena and reality relations; and possesses a tangible shape (semantic, phonetic and graphic).The terms "word meaning" and "lexico-semantic variant" are used as interchangeable elements and express content of a word conjuring up and fixing in mind the idea about an object, property, process and so on, which is a product of cogitative activity of a person, that is, they represent specific actualizations of meaning of a poly-semantic word in a certain speech activity. The term "lexeme" has a broader interpretation and can be defined as a lexical unit of language system.

The term "shade of meaning" is also quite disputable in linguistics. Apresyan, considering synonyms in relation with dictionary units which bear the same conceptual content, thinks that "from logical point of view, a shade of meaning is characterized by its correlation with an insignificant feature of an object that is inherent in concept..." (Apresyan, 1995). Novikov notes that in the functional field

"shade meaning" is based on individual compatibility of each synonym (Novikov, 1968). Khanbikova and Safiullina, call "shade of meaning" a semantic feature of the word, and consider it as "the unity of the features representing a concept: "Meg'nətosmere –suzenengsemantic uzenchelege, meg'nene, toshenchenebarlykkakiteruchebilgelerberdemlegeul". (Hanbikova, 1999).

It may be of interest to mention so-called "stylistic shades" (Hanbikova, 1999). Most linguists share the opinion that stylistic distinctions, even when they appear in a pure form, are always followed by semantic distinctions: "Different stylistic coloring, anyway many of its types, generate semantic distinctions quite similar to what is usually called distinctions in shades of meaning" (Apresyan, 1995). Thus, shades of meaning are distinctive semantic and stylistic characteristics which, without breaking the unity of a synonymic row, indicate the uniqueness and distinctness of each synonym. To demonstrate the given opinion, let us turn to an example. The Tatar adjectives chiber, nefis, nezekatle, kileshle are united in a synonymic row based on the meaning "beautiful". Each synonym has a specific feature that makes it different from the rest. The adjective chiber characterizes external beauty of a person, in most cases beauty of person's face; the adjectives nefis, nezekatle imply elegance of style, delicacy; and kileshle can demonstrate decent manners, behavior or speech. In English the adjective beautiful has synonymous adjectives handsome and pretty. While used to describe people's appearance, the adjectives handsome and pretty express different types of beauty. Pretty underlines small features, shape, that are pleasant to look at, lightness and freshness, lacking force and manliness. Handsome is used in the description of people larger in size and almost of any age with regular features and an attractive figure that cause romantic feelings in someone.

### 3.3. Types of semantic distinctions

Sometimes the most minor differences can lead to unpleasant consequences in cross-cultural communication (Nurgalieva & Motygullina, 2016). Thus, in what follows an attempt is made to explain the semantic distinctions of the synonymous adjectives in Tatar English; work out their typology. The examined data allowed us to indicate distinctions in:

> 1) gradation of the represented quality: kochsez – helsez-zagyif/weak– frail-feeble, iserek – kayefle – salgan - chomergen/ drunk – merry - tipsy – wasted.The first example demonstrates different grades of little physical power or ability: weak / kochsez/helsezexpress lack of physical strength (Ilsoyar, helsezayaklarybelenalpan-tilpenatlap, etiseartynnanashykty. He was too weak to sit up), zagyif / feeblesuggest extreme weakness of body, apathy or lack of strength to perform any act at all (Zagyifkyrmyskamym min yuldayatkan. She's still feeble from her long illness). The synonyms in the second example are characterized by expressing different degrees of drunkenness: kayefle/ merry show the effects of little alcohol, when a person is full of gaiety or high spirits (Ulbugenberazkayeflekurena. They drank, and were merry with him), salgan/

tipsydescribe slightly drunk people, who can not move properly or behave in an inadequate way from drinking (Yaratmyimsalgankeshene! He was by now tired, angry and a little tipsy), chomergen/ wasted suggest too much alcohol, when people are not able to move or speak at all (Tobenakadarchomerganmahrumkalyrgomerdan. He was completely wasted).

2) nature of outward expression of the quality / property: akylsyz – yuler – tile – holyksyz / mad – crazy – insane – demented – deranged. In these synonymic rows, unlike akylsyz / madandcrazy, the adjectives yuler – tile / insanepoint to oddity of assessment, inconsequent reasoning (an insane decision, tile suzlersoileu), while holyksyz / demented, deranged may demonstrate incoherence of speech, senseless acts (холыксыз кылану, .. a sister became deranged and threw herself into the lake). In some cases, the Tatar synonymsyuler – tile represent lightheartedness, or extreme passion for something (yulermahabbat, tileuilar).

3) circumstances, motivating the quality / property: agargan – chyraiekachkan – chyraiekolkebek–tosekitken / pale – pallid – ashen – ashy – wan – livid. The adjectives agargan / palegenerally demonstrate the state caused by various circumstances: hunger, illness, tiredness, strong emotions (pale face; Sin bit nigederagargansyng, toslerengkitken. Nibuldysinga?),while tosekitken/ pallidsuggest extreme physical tension, strong emotional stress, but not any emotional excitement (Bu – artykhaweflianudentosekachkan, kaudarlangan Nail Abdullintawyshy. His pallid face reveals the strain he has been under), chyraiekolkebek/ ashen, ashy, wandemonstratethe consequences of illness, hurt feelings or old age (her face looked wan after her long illness; ...koyashiahshyukkyzdyrugakaramastan, chyraiekolkebek), lividdescribe whiteness because of a strong negative emotion such as anger, annoyance, displeasure (her face was livid with rage).

4) duration and frequency of the quality / property: wakytly–uzatorgan – tizuzuchan – azwakytly – utetorgan / temporary - brief, momentary, passing, short-lived, transient; totrykly –daimi – uzgermes / steady – stable – regular. In the first synonymic row the adjectives wakytly / temporary, transient express not permanent properties, existing or lasting during a limited amount of time, which are likely to change (wakytly eshche – transient worker), azwakytly / short-livedcharacterize the quality lasting for a short period of time (azwakytlybehet – short-lived happiness, azwakytlypauza – momentary pause), utetorgan / passing suggest the quality which are likely to go away or change in the shortest time (utetorgankonner - passing days).In the first synonymic row the adjectives totrykly / steadydescribe things that are developing or growing gradually in an even way (totrykly ungysh / steady progress), stable /uzgermes are used to talk about a state or condition that is not easily changed or likely to change and stays the same over a period of time (uzgermes harakter / stable mind), daimi / regular suggest the quality / state that is happening over and over again or continue for a long time (daimi kadrlar, regular employment).

5) range of objects described. In the Tatar synonymic row buily – buichan – suzan – chakrym baganasy - telegram baganasy – kolgasar – kilbetsez ozyn –

ikende kulegeseand its English counterparttall-towering– gigantic – giant – highthe adjectivesozyn, tallandhighbear a broader meaning, thus may describe a bigger variety of objects. In particular, the Tatar ozyn, unlike the other synonyms, which generally characterize the height of a person, demonstrate different features or qualities of animate and inanimate objects and often describe the length (ozyn uram), the size (ozynhikeia), the duration of a music composition or performance (ozyn koi) and others. The English tall may also describe animate and inanimate objects such as trees, buildings, animals, people (tall trees, tall animals, tall glasses), suggest improbability or incredibility of stories (Jim was full of tall stories about his travels);its synonym high means also exalted in character, having a finely honed sense of rectitude, possessing a higher rate and rich in quality, thus describe a wide variety of objects (high purposes, high society, high living).

6) semantic associations. Each word in a synonymic row bears additional associations, which are not represented by synonyms directly, but are "implied". For example, shere / naked compared to their synonyms ialangach / bare in most cases suggest the absence of clothing on all the body or at least on those parts of the body which should be covered according to the generally accepted rules and regulations. Thus, using the words our consciousness deals with ethical, social and esthetical associations: a challenge to a social taste (naked woman / sherehatyn-kyz); poverty, financial hardships (naked children playing on the heaps of the rubbish); natural beauty(a perfectly shaped naked body; anyngsylusheregeudesenkurep, bashynyugaltyr).

7) evaluative attitude. Not all the words express a neutral attitude to reality. There are words, which bear either a positive or a negative evaluation in relation to concepts they represent. For example, in synonymic rows danlykly – danly – atkazangan – mashhur - shohretle/ famous-celebrated-notorioust he adjectives mashhur, shohretle/celebrated express a positive evaluative attitude; they imply notice or attention attached to a person as a result of achievements in art, or beneficial deeds (mashhurkompozitor, a celebrated painter). The Tataratkazanganddanly maybe are both positive and negative evaluative attitudes: atkazanganzhyrchy (positive evaluative attitude), atkazanganyalganchy(negative evaluative attitude). The English notorious implies a negative evaluative attitude as it suggests fame a person received in consequence of some bad deeds or unfavorable quality (a notorious criminal, gangster).

8) logical emphasis. The synonymic rows awyr – kyien – chiten - katlauly and difficult-hard-challenging mean requiring much work and needing a lot of efforts and skill because one has to deal with something complicated or challenging. In the semantic meanings of hard, challenging /awyr, kyienthe idea of spending a lot of skills, labour and ability is emphasized (awyresh, kyienyullar, ahardless on to learn, challenging career), whereas the adjectives chiten, katlauly / difficult mostly imply hardships and obstacles that appear while dealing with a certain problem / task (chiten / katlaulymes'ele, adifficultproblem).

9) emotional and expressive coloring. Besides a basic nominative meaning, words have a figurative meaning which involves an imaginative, vivid and evocative image in one's mind. Words with a figurative meaning usually imply a set of different emotions and feelings, assessment and experiences. Thus, quite often metaphors, phraseological units, idiomatic expressions are included in synonymic rows: kurkak – kuianyorek/ cowardly – lily-livered, iabyk – tire de soiak/ soiakkapchygy/ thin – skin and bone/ a bag of bones, rahimsez – tashyorek/ cruel – heart of stone. Asitisobvious from the examples, the dominant words have a neutral meaning lacking any emotional coloring whereas their synonyms bear different emotional faculties: derisive laughter mixed with sympathy towards cowardliness or emaciation of a person; anxiety about obduracy and cruelty of other people.

## 4. Conclusion

The researches devoted to lexical synonymy are mostly carried out on a separate language basis. Comprehensive full-scale surveys including two or more languages, which results could be compiled in bilingual or multilingual dictionaries of synonyms and used in lexicographic practice, are carried out quite rarely. Despite the shortage of comparative studies of adjectives in Turkic languages with other non-related languages, there are certain works that deal partly with synonymy in Turkic and other languages. Remarkable are the researches of synonymy in Tatar and English by Yusupov (2005), in Bashkir, Tatar and English by Zainullina (2004), in Altaic and Russian by Dobrynina (2006), in Tatar and Russian by Khismatullina (2009). One of the recent works dealing with lexical synonymy in the Tatar language is the Candidate's dissertation of Zakirova (2007). As for the comparative studies of semantic distinctions between synonymous adjectives, this paper represents the first endeavor to demonstrate the typological similarities between the Tatar and English languages.

Using a language expression, we perform a linguistic action which carries out both cognitive and communicative functions. Each time, pursuing a communicative purpose, the speaker faces the problem of "selecting" a linguistic means. The core of the problem of selection involves the opportunity to express the same cogitative and linguistic content by means of the language which have got various linguistic meanings.

Distinctions between synonyms prove their perpetual existence and sustainability in language; make them the means of expressing various nuances of thought, feelings and emotions; thus, allow us to make a relevant choice of lexical units depending on the communicative purpose.

The comparative analysis of semantic distinctions of adjectives in Tatar and English demonstrated the complex relations between synonyms in both languages. Being a system-based chain of words, a synonymic row experiences the relations of semantic

"attracting" and "distancing", which are provided by semantic distinctions of each synonym. The knowledge of such features leads to better comprehension of any language phenomenon and the avoidance of many pitfalls for English-language learners.

We believe that such comparative studies must be promoted, because it may lead to a more meticulous and cognitive approach to studying and teaching the semantic nature of languages. Moreover, it may develop a reliable theoretical framework within which an educational bilingual (Tatar-English) Dictionary of Synonyms may be compiled.

## 5. Acknowledgements

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