Synonymous Nouns and Metonymy in English Dictionaries

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Abstract

The most common and most easily understood definition of metonymy is that of metonymy as the use of a word or phrase, when one refers to something using the name of something else that it is closely related to. Most metonymic senses are widely known and therefore included in a dictionary, but it is not always easy to recognise it from the dictionary entry. This paper focuses on the lexicographic representation of metonymic senses of 13 selected words and the defining vocabulary used in 'The Big Five'.

Keywords: metonymy, synonym, dictionary, definition

Contents

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyse relations of metonymy and usage of synonymous nouns in definitions in five most commonly used English dictionaries: *Cambridge, Oxford, Merriam-Webster, Collins, and Macmillan*[1]. After a short theoretical overview, an analysis of 13 selected words will be performed. Since there are different ways of introducing metonymic meanings in dictionary, we first examine how metonymic meanings of 13 selected nouns are presented in each dictionary and whether the source sense is introduced before the target sense (if both are present), and then check if any of the synonyms that are listed for each headword in *Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms* are used.

Abbreviations used:

CD – Cambridge Dictionaries

MWD – Merriam-Webster Dictionary

OED – Oxford English Dictionary

MD – Macmillan Dictionary

CED – Collins English Dictionary

WNDS – Webster's New Dictionary of Synonyms

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[1] Online versions.

2. Theoretical Overview

2.1. Metonymy

Metonymy is a figure of language and thought in which one entity is used to refer to, or 'provide access to', another entity to which it is somehow related (Littlemore, 2015: 65). From a cognitive linguistic perspective metonymy is defined as follows:

> Metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual element or entity (thing, event, property), the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity (thing, event, property), the target, within the same frame, domain or idealized cognitive model (ICM). (Kövecses and Radden, 1998: 39)

Metonymy is often confused with metaphor, but, unlike metaphor, it does not include comparison. Metonymy will be categorised in types according to *Conceptual Metonymy and Lexicographic Representation* by Sylwia Wojciechowska (page 80) (2012).

Table 1. Typology of the study.

PART-WHOLE	WHOLE-PART	PART-PART
MATERIAL-OBJECT(S)	TREE-WOOD	CONTAINER-CONTENTS
FRUIT-TREE	FRUIT-FLESH	CONTENTS-CONTAINER
GRAIN-CEREAL	FRUIT-JUICE	ACTION-RESULT
COMPONENT-PRODUCT	ANIMAL-FUR	ACTION-PARTICIPANT
BODY PART-PERSON	ANIMAL-MEAT	INSTRUMENT-PRODUCT
CHARACTERISITIC-ENTITY	FRUIT-COLOUR	PRODUCT-INSTRUMENT
DRINK-MEAL	SUBSTANCE-COLOUR	VOICE-SINGER
OBJECT INVOLVED-EVENT	BUILDING-SECTION	VOICE-PART
ACTION-EVENT	EVENT-PARTICIPANT	PERCEPTION-PERCEIVED
	EVENT-INSTRUMENT	EMOTION-CAUSE
		PLACE-INHABITANTS
		DISEASE-PERSON AFFECTED
		MASS MEDIA-JOURNALISTS

2.2. Synonymy

Synonym is a word or phrase that has the same or nearly the same meaning as another word or phrase in the same language. Some linguists differentiate three types of synonymy: absolute synonymy, cognitive synonymy, and near-synonymy. Absolute synonymy is defined as the complete identity of all meanings of two or more lexemes in all contexts, but it is arguable whether such relations between words even exist. Cognitive synonymy is what most linguists

would regard as synonymy, and near-synonyms are lexemes whose meaning is relatively close or more or less similar (Stanojević, 2009: 194).

2.3. Lexicography and types of definitions

Lexicography is "the professional activity and academic field concerned with dictionaries and other reference works. It has two basic divisions: lexicographic practice, or dictionary making, and lexicographic theory, or dictionary research" (Hartmann and James, 2002: 85).

According to OED, definition is an explanation of the meaning of a word or phrase. There are three basic types of lexicographic definitions: synonym definitions, referential definitions, and formulaic definitions (Benson, Benson, and Ilson, 1986: 203). The word defined should be identified by *genus* and *differentia* – the word must first be defined according to the class of things to which it belongs, and then distinguished from all other things within that class (Landau, 1984: 120).

3. Analysis of Selected Lexemes

Words that are going to be included in this analysis are: *array, artillery, arrest, arsenal, ash, aspersion, aspiration, assemblage, assembly, assistance, assurance, attempt, attire*.

3.1. *Array*

Some dictionaries, like CD, do not acknowledge metonymic sense of the word *array* and simply combine the meanings into one definition: CD defines it as "a large group of things or people, especially one that is attractive or causes admiration or has been positioned in a particular way". The rest of the dictionaries taken into consideration in this paper have separated different meanings into several definitions and further recognised metonymically derived senses. Source of metonymy is the sense of order or arrangement, that is, a lexeme meaning order or arrangement stands for the entire phrase meaning arrangement of troops, numbers, or other objects. While in some dictionaries the relation between the source and target is shown by listing the target as subsense (as 2.1. or 2. a.), in others it is listed as a separate definition.

OED lists these meanings:

1. An impressive display or range of a particular type of thing

2. <u>An ordered series or arrangement</u>

2.1 <u>An arrangement of troops</u>

2.2 *Mathematics* <u>An arrangement of quantities or symbols in rows and columns; a matrix.</u>

2.3 *Computing* <u>An indexed set of related elements.</u>

3. [MASS NOUN] *literary* Elaborate or beautiful clothing:

4. *Law* <u>A list of jurors impanelled.</u>

The semantic relationship in CHARACTERISITIC-ENTITY metonymy is visible in the fact that the definition of the target contains the word *arrangement* as does the definition of the source. However, *a list of jurors impanelled* is listed separately because orderly arrangement was not taken into account. MWD took a different approach:

1.a <u>a regular and imposing grouping or arrangement</u>

1.b <u>an orderly listing of jurors impanelled</u>

2.a <u>clothing, attire</u>

2.b <u>rich or beautiful apparel</u>: finery

3. a body of soldiers: militia

4. an imposing group: large number; also: variety, assortment

5.a (1) : <u>a number of mathematical elements arranged in rows and columns</u> (2) : <u>a data structure in which similar elements of data are arranged in a table</u>

5.b <u>a series of statistical data arranged in classes in order of magnitude</u>

6. a group of elements forming a complete unit

CHARACTERISITIC-ENTITY metonymy can be seen in definitions listed under 1. and 5. where definition of the source precedes definitions of target(s). MEMBER OF THE CATEGORY-CATEGORY metonymy is present in the definitions under 2. In MD source meaning is not covered so it is difficult to recognise metonymy in following definition: *an arrangement of numbers and symbols organized in rows and columns, used when writing computer programs*. CED offers separate definitions for every meaning, but covers both the source and target meaning.

While none of the dictionaries used synonym definitions for any of the meanings of the lexeme *array*, they all used in their definitions words *display* or *arrangement* that are listed in WNDS as synonymous to *array*.

3.2. *Artillery*

Artillery is, as listed in WNDS, ordnance, munitions, arms, or ammunition. In CD, OBJECT-USER metonymy is introduced with conjunction *or*: *very large guns that are moved on wheels or metal tracks, <u>or the part of the army that uses these</u>*. OED and MWD introduce target meanings as subsenses, while MD and CED offer them as separate definitions. OED and MD use the same defining vocabulary in source and target meaning, while CED offers the anaphoric use of *such* when defining target meaning. MWD is the only dictionary that uses synonymous noun for defining source meaning: *large bore crew-served mounted firearms (as guns, howitzers, and rockets)*: <u>ordnance</u>.

3.3. *Arrest*

CD and MD do not offer any additional meanings for the word *arrest*; all are subsumed under one definition. ACTION-RESULT metonymy is best visible in MWD – the same defining vocabulary is used for both the source and target meaning and they are listed under the same number as separate subsenses:

1a : <u>the act of stopping</u>

1b : the condition of being <u>stopped </u>or inactive

The ACTION-RESULT metonymy is present in CED, although for a different sense of the word *arrest*. The meanings of source and target were not listed under the same or consecutive numbers:

> 1. the act of taking a person into custody, esp under lawful authority
>
> 3. the state of being held, esp under lawful authority

WNDS does not mention *stopping* as a possible synonym for the word *arrest*, but, even though none of the dictionaries offers synonym definitions, words such as *seizing, detention,* or *catching* that are listed in it are part of the defining vocabulary in each of them.

3.4. *Arsenal*

WNDS does not give synonyms for the meaning of metonymic source: the only synonyms it offers are *armory* and *magazine* so it is impossible to detect metonymy in WNDS. There is not one way in which dictionaries deal with CONTENTS-CONTAINER metonymy of the word *arsenal*. In CD it is hard to recognise which one is the source meaning because they listed the target meaning before the source and they are introduced as separate definitions:

> 1. a building where weapons and military equipment are stored
>
> 2. a collection of weapons

In MD the source meaning is as well listed after the target – they are listed under the same number as separate subsenses:

> 1.1. an establishment for the manufacture or storage of arms and military equipment
>
> 1.2. a collection of weapons

Metonymy is, on the other hand, easily detectable in OED because the target meanings are introduced as subsenses:

> 1. A collection of weapons and military equipment
>
> 1.1. A place where weapons and military equipment are stored or made
>
> 1.2. An array of resources available for a certain purpose

None of the dictionaries defined *arsenal* with synonym definition nor did they use any of the synonyms from WNDS while defining it.

3.5. *Ash*

Metonymy is present in both meanings of the word *ash*: *the powdery residue left after the burning of a substance* and a type of a tree. The semantic relationship in CATEGORY-MEMBER OF THE CATEGORY metonymy is noticeable in the fact that both the definition of the target and that of the source point to residue that has remained after something had been burned – the target of the metonymy is a subset of the domain covered by the general world.

CD does not offer definitions for any of the metonymic meanings, definitions of the target meanings are not present. CED has two separate entries for *ash*: one for each above mentioned sense, but metonymy is not taken into account when defining it as *residue formed when matter is*

burned. OED, MWD, and MD acknowledge metonymic meaning of this sense of the word, but they present it in a different way. Out of these three, only OED introduces target meaning as a subsense of source meaning:

> 1. The powdery residue left after the burning of a substance
>
> 1.1.(ashes) The remains of a human body after cremation or burning

TREE-WOOD metonymy is included in OED, MWM, MD, and CED. All of the dictionaries first brought the source meaning making it easier to recognise the metonymic meaning. While in OED, CED and MWD both the target and source meaning are introduced as separate senses, in MD target meaning is introduced as subsense of the source meaning:

> 2 a tree with a smooth grey bark
>
> a. the wood of an ash tree

The only synonyms WNDS offers for the word *ash* are *cinders, clinkers,* and *embers* and they mean *the remains of combustible material after it has been destroyed by fire*. Since those words are not completely synonymous, none of the dictionaries use any of them while defining the word *ash*.

3.6. *Aspersion*

Only CED and MWD acknowledge the metonymic meaning of the word *aspersion*, while CD and MD do not offer definitions for the word in question. ACTION-RESULT metonymy is not easily detectable in neither of the two dictionaries because the target meaning comes before the source meaning. In MWD both meanings are listed under the same number as separate subsenses with source meaning introduced with anaphoric use of *such*:

> 2a : a false or misleading charge meant to harm someone's reputation
>
> b : the act of making such a charge

 Some of the words that WNDS offers as synonyms of *aspersion* are *libel, lampoon, obloquy, slander,* and *scandal*. None of the dictionaries use synonym definitions, but CED used the word *slanderous* in the definition of the source meaning.

3.7. *Aspiration*

Metonymic meaning of the word *aspiration* is most easily recognisable in MWD and CED; both dictionaries first introduce source meaning after which comes the target meaning. In MWD target meaning is listed as subsense and introduces with anaphoric *such*:

> 3a : a strong desire to achieve something high or great
>
> b : an object of such desire

while in CED they are introduced as separate definitions under consecutive numbers:

1. <u>strong desire to achieve something</u>, such as success

2. <u>the aim of such desire</u>

MD combines both meanings under one definition and it is difficult to recognise the direction of metonymic process because the target meaning comes before the source meaning. CD and OED do not acknowledge this metonymy – CD only offers definition of the target meaning and OED of the source meaning.

Metonymy is also present in other senses of this word that concern phonetics and medicine. Target meanings are subsets of the domain covered by the general word. This metonymy is present in OED, MWD, and CD (target meanings are listed as subsenses), but is most easily detectable in MWD:

2: <u>a drawing of something in, out, up, or through by or as if by suction</u>: as

a: the act of breathing and especially of <u>breathing in</u>

b: <u>the withdrawal </u>of fluid or tissue from the body

c: <u>the taking of foreign matter into the lungs</u> with the respiratory current

Synonyms found in WNDS are *ambition, pretension, aim, goal,* and *objective* and none of them appears in any of the definitions.

3.8. *Assemblage*

Word *assemblage* has many derived meanings at it is quite hard to recognise which one was derived from which. All of the dictionaries taken into account have defined the same meanings of the word but have arranged them differently.

For example, CD offers an entry like this:

1. <u>a collection of things or a group of people or animals</u>

2. <u>the process of joining or putting things together</u>

3. An assemblage is also a work of art that is <u>made of different things put together</u>

The rest of the dictionaries also have those meanings defined in the same order. *An assemblage is also a work of art that is made of different things put together* refers to the target meaning, but that raises a question – which one refers to the source meaning. In other words, we cannot be sure whether this it CHARACTERISITIC-ENTITY or ACTION-RESULT metonymy – former means that the source meaning is referred to by *a collection of things or a group of people or animals*, while latter defines the source meaning as *the process of joining or putting things together*. MWD and CED have incorporated one more ACTION-RESULT metonymy introduced by conjunction *or*: *the act or process of assembling or the state of being assembled* (CED).

All of the dictionaries use the words listed in WNDS while defining the word *assemblage* (such as *collection* and *gathering*), but only MWD and CED used synonym definitions: MWD used *gathering* and CD used *collection* and *assembly*.

3.9. *Assembly*

CD does not separate metonymic senses of the word *assembly*, both target and source meaning are subsumed under one definition: <u>*a group of people, especially one that meets regularly for a particular purpose, such as government*</u>, or, more generally, <u>*the process of coming together*</u>, or <u>*the state of being together*</u>.

OED has thoroughly differentiated and grouped various meaning of the word *assembly*:

1. <u>A group of people gathered together in one place for a common purpose</u>

1.1. <u>A group of people elected to make laws or decisions for a particular country or region</u>

2. <u>The action of gathering together as a group for a common purpose</u>

2.1. <u>The regular gathering</u> of the teachers and pupils of a school at the start or end of the day

3. <u>The action of fitting together the component parts</u> of a machine or other object

3.1. <u>A unit consisting of components that have been fitted together</u>

CATEGORY-MEMBER OF THE CATEGORY metonymy listed under the number 1 is based on the fact that the word meaning any group of people gathered for a common purpose is used to refer to a group of people gathered for a specific purpose – to make laws. Target meaning is listed as subsense of source meaning. None of the other dictionaries have made this connection; these meanings are listed under separate definitions; not even under consecutive numbers.

ACTION-EVENT metonymy can be seen under the number 2 where definition of the source meaning precedes definition of target. OED is the only dictionary that acknowledges this connection.

ACTION-RESULT metonymy listed under 3 is also present in MWD and MD where target meaning is listed as subsense of source meaning.

MD has included one sense of the word that none of the other dictionaries have: EVENT-PARTICIPANT metonymy:

2. a meeting of people who represent different parts of a large organization

2.a. a group of people who meet together for a particular reason

Assembly has some senses quite similar to those of *assemblage*, so WNDS listed a lot of same synonyms. While MWD has defined one of the senses with synonym definition:

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assemblage, other dictionaries have only used synonyms listed in WNDS in other types of definitions.

3.10. *Assistance*

CD and MD do not offer any additional definitions or any metonymic senses of the word *assistance*. MWD combined target and source meaning of ACTION-RESULT metonymy under one definition using the conjunction *or*: *the act of assisting or the help supplied*. Entry in CED also includes this type of metonymy, but the target meaning is listed as separate definition and it precedes source meaning:

1. help; support

2. the act of assisting

OED offers ACTION-INSTRUMENT metonymy with target meaning being listed as subsense of the source meaning:

1. The action of helping someone by sharing work

1.1. The provision of money, resources, or information to help someone

Some of the synonyms listed in NWDS are *help, aid, service*, and *profit*. CD and CED both offer synonym definition: *help*.

3.11. *Assurance*

MEMBER OF THE CATEGORY-CATEGORY metonymy is present in OED; target of the metonymy is introduced as subsense of the source meaning:

2. Confidence or certainty in one's own abilities

2.1. Certainty about something

MWD introduced ACTION-RESULT metonymy that is not present in other dictionaries. Target meaning is listed as subsense of source meaning:

*1***:** the act or action of assuring: as

a **:** pledge, guarantee

NWDS separated synonyms into two groups:

1. certitude, certainty, conviction, belief, faith, confidence, reliance

2. self-assurance, confidence, self-confidence, self-possession, resolution

Although all of the dictionaries defined certain senses using synonym definitions, none of them used any of the words listed in WNDS, but they have used the synonym *confidence* in other types of definitions.

3.12. *Attempt*

While MD does not offer any additional definitions that would include metonymy, all of the other dictionaries do. OED has the most separated definitions:

1. An effort to achieve or complete a difficult task or action

1.1. An effort to surpass a record or conquer a mountain

1.2. A bid to kill someone

1.3. A thing produced as a result of trying to make or achieve something

Source meaning is listed under 1 with target meanings listed as susbsenses. While first definition refers to effort to achieve any kind of difficult task, definitions under 1.1. and 1.2. refer to a particular task, such as breaking a record or killing someone. This type of metonymy is CATEGORY-MEMBER OF THE CATEGORY metonymy and it is also introduced in CD where source and target meaning are listed under separate number. Another type of metonymy present in this entry is ACTION-RESULT metonymy and it is listed under 1.3. MWD also approached it the same way, but CED separated source and target meaning into two distinct definitions:

1. an endeavour to achieve something; effort

1. a result of an attempt or endeavour

None of the dictionaries used synonym definitions with any of the words listed in WNDS.

3.13. *Attire*

The semantic relationship in CATEGORY-MEMBER OF THE CATEGORY metonymy is visible in the fact that *attire* can refer to any type of clothing or to a formal type of clothing. None of the dictionaries have separated source meaning from target, both meanings are combined into one definition, separated by comma, like in CD: *clothes, especially of a particular or formal type*.

Some of the synonyms listed in WNDS are *clothes, clothing, apparel*, and *raiment*.

4. Conclusion

Lexicography is an academic field concerned with dictionaries: compiling dictionaries and analysing relationships within vocabulary of a language. While compiling a dictionary most lexicographers take great care of synonyms and antonyms, but they are not so thorough when it comes to metonymy. In five dictionaries considered in this paper, representation of metonymic senses is inconsistent and in some cases either target or source meaning is omitted. Target meanings are sometimes listed as subsenses under the main sense, in some cases they are listed as separate sense, or they are not listed at all. Target meaning can be defined using the same defining vocabulary as was used for the source meaning, it can be introduced after the semicolon, with the help of anaphoric *such*, or without reference to the source. Some dictionaries were found to have better organised metonymical senses, but there are inconsistencies even within the same dictionary. OED is the most systematically organised out of these five dictionaries. Metonymy is easily recognised because source meaning always precedes the target meaning: with the exception of *aspersion* and *attire*, every metonymical sense is listed as a subsense of the source. MWD is also pretty well organised; only four entries offer target meanings as separate definitions, one of which is the entry for *aspersion* where target meaning is introduced before the source. CED deals with metonymy a bit differently – none of the metonymical meanings is offered as a subsense, but they mostly come after the source. CD and MD do not pay close attention to metonymy: they rarely list target meaning as a subsense (CD once, MD twice). They either offer them as separate definitions, or they completely omit target meanings. Even though OED generally introduces metonymical senses the same way throughout the dictionary, we can safely assume that lexicographers have not decided on one formal method. The easiest was to recognise metonymy in a dictionary is to have target meanings listed as subsenses and to use the same defining vocabulary. While it is important to use consistent methodology when dealing with metonymy, figures of speech such as metonymy are not really the first thing that people who do not deal with lexicography and language pay attention to when looking up a word in a dictionary.

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