

## SEMANTIC CHANGES IN THE DIALOGIC DISCOURSE OF LITERARY TEXTS

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**Abstract.** This study is motivated by the need to understand how semantic shifts occur within the fluid environment of modern literary texts. It is hypothesized that semantic changes, specifically broadening and narrowing, are not merely structural linguistic shifts but are dynamic phenomena driven by the interaction between speaker and listener in real-time communication. The primary purpose of this research is to analyze the functional and discursive capacities of language that allow for these shifts. To achieve this, the study employs qualitative linguistic analysis and discourse analysis of dialogic exchanges in literary works. The findings indicate that words in dialogue transcend fixed lexical meanings, acquiring pragmatic and emotional nuances that create multi-layered interpretations based on context. The research concludes that dialogic discourse serves as the primary environment for semantic evolution. By highlighting the role of communicative intent in meaning-making, this study offers a fresh perspective on semantic flexibility, demonstrating that linguistic units are inherently adaptable within social and literary frameworks.

**Keywords:** literary discourse, dialogue, semantic broadening, semantic narrowing, pragmatics.

## MODIFICĂRI SEMANTICE ÎN DISCURSUL DIALOGIC AL TEXTELOR LITERARE

**Rezumat.** Acest studiu este motivat de necesitatea de a înțelege modul în care se produc mutațiile semantice în mediul fluid al textelor literare moderne. Se testează că modificările semantice, în special extinderea și restrângerea sensului, nu sunt doar simple deplasări lingvistice structurale, ci reprezintă fenomene dinamice generate de interacțiunea dintre vorbitor și ascultător în cadrul comunicării în timp real. Scopul principal al acestei cercetări este de a analiza capacitățile funcționale și discursive al limbii care permit apariția acestor mutații. Pentru a realiza acest lucru, studiul utilizează analiza lingvistică calitativă și analiza de discurs a schimburilor dialogice din operele literare. Constatările indică faptul că cuvintele integrate în dialog transcend semnificațiile lexicale fixe, dobândind nuanțe pragmatice și emoționale care creează interpretări multistratificate în funcție de context. Cercetarea concluzionează că discursul dialogic servește ca mediu principal pentru evoluția semantică. Prin evidențierea rolului intenției comunicative în configurarea sensului, acest studiu oferă o perspectivă proaspătă asupra flexibilității semantice, demonstrând că unitățile lingvistice sunt în mod inerent adaptabile în cadrul structurilor sociale și literare.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** discurs literar, dialog, extindere semantică, restrângere semantică, pragmatică.

### Introduction

Dialogic discourse is a type of speech formed on the basis of interaction and requiring the participation of at least two communicative parties. In this type of discourse, meaning is determined not only by the semantic structure of linguistic units but also by the speaker's intention, situation, context and the system of interpersonal relations.

## Materials and Methods

The research utilizes a qualitative linguistic framework to investigate the mechanisms of semantic broadening and narrowing within literary dialogic discourse. The methodology is structured into three primary phases: corpus selection, discursive analysis, and functional-semantic evaluation. The study analysed a selected corpus of modern literary texts (specify the authors/works here). The selection criteria were based on the frequency of character-driven dialogues and the presence of varied communicative situations. A total of [insert number] dialogic units were extracted for detailed semantic parsing. The primary method employed is discourse analysis, focusing on the interactional context between the "addresser" and "addressee." Each dialogue was examined for:

1. Contextual constraints: How the immediate situation influences word choice.
2. Pragmatic markers: The use of emotional and expressive nuances that shift lexical meaning.
3. Semantic shifts: Identification of instances where the "dictionary" meaning was either expanded (broadening) or restricted (narrowing) based on the speaker's intent.

## Results and Discussion

One of the main characteristics of dialogic discourse is its interactive nature. Each utterance is formed in connection with the previous one and creates the basis for the next. This makes the meaning-making process not linear but dynamic and multifaceted. The speaker constructs their message not only based on the lexical meaning of words but also by taking into account the listener's reaction [8].

Another important feature is contextual dependence. In dialogic discourse, the meaning of words often changes depending on the situation. The same word can acquire different semantic shades in different contexts, which creates conditions for the natural occurrence of semantic broadening and narrowing.

Dialogues are also characterized by a high degree of implicitness. That is, the expressed idea is often not fully explicit but conveyed indirectly. In such cases the listener reconstructs additional layers of meaning through inference. This creates a discrepancy between the lexical meaning of a word and its actual communicative meaning, which is one of the main mechanisms of semantic change. *“Semantic change is the process by which a linguistic unit goes beyond its original meaning and acquires new semantic nuances. This change can manifest in various forms; however, from the perspective of dialogic discourse, the two most significant directions are semantic broadening and semantic narrowing”* [11, p. 13].

Semantic broadening is characterized by a word extending beyond its original semantic field to express more general or wider concepts. As a result, the scope of meaning expands and the word becomes usable in new contexts.

In dialogic discourse semantic broadening mainly occurs through metaphorical transfer, metonymic expansion, emotional-expressive usage, abstraction and concretization. As a result of these processes, words perform not only nominative but also evaluative, emotional and pragmatic functions.

Semantic narrowing, on the other hand, is the restriction of a word's general semantic field to a more specific context. In this process, the scope of the concept decreases and becomes limited to a particular situation. In dialogues, semantic narrowing manifests in concrete situational usage, social and psychological contexts, terminologization and individual stylistic frameworks. This process serves to increase precision and specificity in communication.

Pragmatic factors play a decisive role in semantic changes in dialogic discourse. The main factor is the speaker's intention and communicative goal. The same word can acquire different meanings when used with different intentions. *"According to the pragmatic approach, meaning is not only what is said but also what is implied. In this respect, concepts such as implicature, presupposition, and inference are of particular importance. Speakers often do not express their thoughts directly but convey them indirectly, during which the meaning of words may broaden or narrow"* [12, p. 68-69].

Emotional state also plays an important role in dialogues. *"The speaker's emotional tone can change the semantic load of words. The same expression may convey completely different meanings in different emotional contexts"* [6, p.19].

The cognitive approach occupies a special place in explaining semantic changes. According to this approach, language is a product of human cognition, and semantic changes are closely related to cognitive processes. The most important cognitive mechanisms include conceptual metaphor, categorization, prototype theory and associative thinking [5]. Through these mechanisms, individuals relate new experiences to existing concepts, leading to new semantic nuances.

This process is more active in dialogic discourse, as communicative participants constantly reinterpret and adjust information during interaction.

### **Semantic narrowing in dialogic discourse**

Semantic narrowing in dialogic discourse is characterized by the restriction of a word's general semantic potential within a specific situational and communicative framework. This process is particularly evident in literary texts through dialogue, as the speech of characters closely resembles real-life communication and is shaped by their social status, psychological state and communicative purpose.

In Balzac's works, semantic narrowing in dialogic speech is mostly observed in the context of social relations. For example: *"You will behave the same way this evening; I will never receive him in my house again..."* [1, p.69].

In this sentence, although the word “house” denotes a physical place lexically, within the dialogue it functions not merely as a dwelling but as an indicator of social relations and boundaries of acceptance. The expression “not to receive in the house” implies social rejection rather than a physical action. Thus, the concept of “house” narrows from a broad semantic field to a specific socio-psychological meaning.

In another dialogue: “*You don’t know him; he is a different man...*” [1, p.193].

Here, the word “man” does not express the general concept of a human being. Within the dialogue, this word refers to an individual possessing a specific character type and a particular behavioural model. Thus, the word “man” undergoes semantic narrowing and transforms into a unit of socio-psychological identification. This type of narrowing is especially widespread in literary dialogues, as characters often concretize general concepts in their speech.

In Jack London’s works, semantic narrowing in dialogic discourse emerges primarily in connection with the struggle for life and physical conditions. For example: “*If you want to live, you must endure everything*” [7, p. 403].

In this sentence, the word “to live” does not convey the general meaning of biological or philosophical existence. Rather it is used specifically in the sense of survival under harsh natural conditions and engaging in physical struggle. Thus, the semantic field of the word narrows and becomes limited to a concrete situation. Here “to live” is no longer understood as an abstract concept but as a concrete activity involving struggle, endurance and physical resistance.

Let us consider another expression frequently encountered in the same texts: “*This will not do*” [7, p. 386].

Here, the word “thing” (iş) does not denote a general type of activity. Within the dialogue, it refers to a specific situation and a particular chain of events. The concept of “thing” moves out of its broad semantic field and acquires a narrow meaning referring only to a particular situation. This is a typical example of pragmatic narrowing.

In George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, semantic narrowing is more closely related to the ideological context. Although the words used in dialogues appear to retain their original meanings, in reality their semantic fields are significantly restricted: “*All animals are equal*” [9, p. 4].

In this sentence, the word “equal” represents a universal ethical and social concept. However, within the dialogic context, it does not denote real equality but merely expresses an ideological slogan. In subsequent dialogues, it becomes clear that this concept is further restricted. Thus, the notion of “equality” undergoes semantic narrowing and carries only a formal and manipulative meaning.

Let us consider another expression from the same work: “*This is the law*” [10, p. 62].

Here the word “law” does not represent a general legal norm but denotes a rule established by a particular authority and subject to change. In other words, the meaning of the word shifts from objectivity to a subjective and limited context. This is an example of ideological semantic narrowing.

In William Faulkner’s works, semantic narrowing in dialogic discourse is more closely related to psychological and social identification. For example: “*For people like us, this is not life*” [3, p. 342].

In this sentence, the word “life” does not express the general concept of existence. It denotes a way of life corresponding to a specific social condition. The expression “this is not life” essentially means “*this is not an acceptable life for us*”. Thus, the concept of “life” undergoes semantic narrowing and becomes limited to the perspective of a particular social group.

More complex forms of semantic narrowing in dialogic discourse emerge not only through explicit context but also through implicit and emotional nuances. In such cases, although the lexical meaning of the word appears to be preserved, its actual semantic load is understood only within a specific situation and becomes significantly restricted [6].

Semantic broadening in dialogic discourse is characterized by a word extending beyond its original lexical meaning to encompass a wider semantic field and acquire additional shades of meaning in new contexts. In literary texts, this process is particularly evident through dialogues, as the speech of characters carries not only informational but also emotional, ideological and aesthetic load.

In George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, semantic broadening manifests itself especially prominently within the framework of ideological discourse. For example, in the expression used in dialogues and collective speech, “*Four legs good, two legs bad!*” [9, p.32], the words “good” and “bad” lose their original ethical content and turn into indicators of ideological division. In this context, the concept of “good” expresses belonging to a particular social group, while “bad” denotes the forces opposing that group. Thus, these words expand semantically, moving beyond a simple evaluative category and becoming core components of a political and ideological system.

In the same work the use of the concept of “rebellion” represents another form of semantic broadening. In expressions such as “*It was the song of the Rebellion...*” [6, p. 58], the word “rebellion” is presented not only as a specific historical event but also as a symbol of collective memory, ideological origin, and social transformation. This demonstrates that the semantic field of the word expands, acquiring an abstract and multilayered meaning.

Another interesting example of semantic broadening in the same work can be observed in the use of the concept “dear” (doğma). In the sentence “*This farm had never seemed so dear to them before*” [9, p. 68], the word “dear” does not merely express familial

or personal closeness but also acquires additional semantic nuances such as collective identification, belonging, and ideological attachment. Thus, the meaning of the word expands from individual relationships to the social and collective level.

In the works of William Faulkner, semantic broadening is mainly realized through metaphorical and cognitive mechanisms. For example, in the expression “*The individual is not much, just a handful of dust*” [3, p. 67], the word “dust” ceases to be merely a physical substance and becomes an abstract concept expressing the transience and fragility of human life. In this case, a concrete object transforms into a carrier of abstract meaning, thus expanding semantically. Similarly, in the expression “*the dough from which human immortality is kneaded*” [3, p.65], the concept of “dough” is not a physical material but functions as a conceptual metaphor expressing the continuity and collective existence of humanity. Such usage demonstrates how words expand at the cognitive level and enter new semantic domains.

In Jack London’s works, semantic broadening in dialogic discourse emerges more in connection with emotional and situational context. In the sentence “*If you want to live, you must endure everything*” [7, p.35], the concept of “to live” acquires not only the meaning of biological existence but also additional semantic nuances such as struggle, endurance, and willpower. This results in both the concretization and functional expansion of the word, demonstrating the multilayered nature of semantic processes in dialogic discourse.

In the works of Honoré de Balzac semantic broadening appears mainly in relation to social and psychological context. In dialogues, the concept of “house” transforms from a physical space into a semantic unit expressing a system of social relations, emotional tension, and intra-family conflicts [1]. At the same time, the word “man” goes beyond the general notion of a human being and acquires a broader meaning expressing a specific character type, behavioural model and social identification. This shows that words expand semantically in connection with social reality.

The examples presented above demonstrate that semantic narrowing in the dialogic discourse of literary texts occurs in various directions and is conditioned by several main factors: contextual limitation, pragmatic purpose, social and psychological factors, and ideological influence. Different combinations of these factors can be observed in the dialogues of various authors. In Balzac semantic narrowing is more related to social relations and communication ethics, whereas in Jack London’s works it is associated with physical struggle and living conditions. In Orwell, semantic narrowing becomes a tool of ideological manipulation, while in Faulkner it emerges in connection with psychological and social identification.

Semantic narrowing in dialogic discourse is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also an indicator of how humans perceive and express the world. Words lose their general meanings depending on the context and become restricted in accordance with a specific

communicative purpose [2]. This constitutes one of the main features of semantic dynamics in literary texts.

The research has shown that semantic changes in the dialogic discourse of literary texts are not random but systematic and regular in nature and are conditioned by specific pragmatic and cognitive mechanisms.

In dialogic discourse semantic broadening mainly occurs through metaphorical transfer, emotional-expressive usage, and abstraction and this process leads to words surpassing their original semantic boundaries and acquiring new domains of meaning.

Semantic narrowing, on the other hand, is characterized by the restriction of words within a concrete situation, social relations and psychological context, whereby the general semantic potential of the word is realized within a limited framework.

The frequent occurrence in dialogues of general concepts such as “man”, “life”, “thing”, “law” and “equality” acquiring specific meanings in particular contexts is one of the main indicators of semantic narrowing.

The processes of semantic broadening and narrowing do not occur in isolation but rather in interaction and parallel; the same word can both broaden and narrow in different contexts.

The nature of semantic changes varies across different types of literary discourse: in socio-realistic discourse, semantic narrowing is more closely related to the concretization of social relations; in satirical and ideological discourse, semantic narrowing takes on a manipulative character and leads to the distortion of the original meaning of words.

From a pragmatic perspective, semantic changes are directly related to the speaker's intention, communicative purpose and emotional state; words are often used not in their lexical but in functional and situational meanings.

Due to the high level of implicitness in dialogic discourse, meaning is often expressed indirectly rather than directly and is reconstructed by the listener through inference.

From a cognitive perspective, semantic changes are closely connected with the conceptual structures of human thinking, such as metaphor, association, categorization and prototype models and these mechanisms enable words to acquire new semantic nuances.

Since meaning in dialogic discourse is formed in real time, semantic transformations are more dynamic and flexible in nature.

In literary texts dialogues serve as the most active environment for semantic changes, where words perform not only nominative but also emotional, evaluative and ideological functions.

## **Conclusions**

Thus, semantic broadening and narrowing in the dialogic discourse of literary texts demonstrate that word meanings change dynamically depending on context, and these

processes are closely related to pragmatic purposes, cognitive mechanisms, and discourse conditions. Dialogues, as the most vivid form of language, constitute the domain where semantic transformations are most clearly observed, and here words function not only with their lexical meanings but also with situational and implicit layers of meaning.

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