

The Contrastive Componential Analysis of the English Verb “to love”

Tia Xenia

tia.xenia@atmajaya.ac.id

English Education Department, Unika Atma Jaya

Abstract

It has been commonly understood that a word is rich in synonyms; however if those synonymous words are analyzed comprehensively, it shows that they do not exactly denote the same meaning. In order to distinguish one meaning to the other meaning, the features of each synonym are classified to obtain the distinctive features. The aims of this study are to identify the distinctive features of the lexical items that are synonymous with the English verb “to love” and to explain the polysemy of that English verb. The English verb “to love” was taken as the object since it is a basic general English word that appears frequently in everyday contexts. To analyse the data, the researcher listed down the synonyms of “to love”. After that, those synonyms were contrasted to obtain the distinctive features. By comparing the meanings of to love to the distinctive features obtained, the polysemy could be found and explained. This paper shows that there were sixteen synonymous verbs, 29 distinctive features that were classified into seven major features, and six polysemy of the English verb, to love.

Keywords: meaning, componential analysis

Introduction

Words as a language unit refer to some particular meanings that they denote. Those are composed of one or more morphemes and smaller components of meaning in order to form different words. Since each word conveys a particular meaning, it has the possibility to have more than one meaning for a lexical item. Besides, it is also known that a word may share similar meanings with another different word.

Since a word may have synonyms that share similar meanings, it has to be understood that they are not exactly the same. The example can be seen in the English verb *to love*. Based on the Cambridge dictionary, the English verb, *to love*, means to like another adult very much or to like something very much. By these meanings, the verb *to love* was noticed to have other synonyms that share

similar meanings and some distinctive features can be found to contrast them.

Since some particular different lexical items may share a certain unit of meaning, the componential analysis is used to discover and organize the semantic components of the words. These semantic components can distinguish the lexical relations, grammatical, and syntactic processes by defining those relations and processes. By this explanation, in order to contrast one lexical item with another lexical item that conveyed similar meanings, the componential analysis can be applied.

Based on this background consideration, the componential analysis would be conducted to figure out the contrastive meanings of the synonyms of *to love* in order to obtain the distinctive features between each synonym and the other one. Next, the polysemy of the English verb *to love* could be found. Therefore,

the aims of this paper are to identify the distinctive features by contrasting the lexical items that share similar meanings with the verb *to love* and explain the polysemy of the verb *to love* that will be easily found by looking at its features.

It is hoped that the findings of this study would be useful for the language users in which they could see the differences of the verb *to love* and its synonyms. As a result, it could help them to make use of the verb *to love* and its synonyms accurately based on the context that they referred. Furthermore, this study could inspire them to look at the word critically, in which they realized that each word might denote different meanings as well as have different lexical units that share similar meanings.

Review of Literature

In this part, the theories will be divided into two parts: meaning and the componential analysis that will be elaborated in the following parts.

Meaning

To understand it, there are two parts to describe. Those are the component of meaning and the types of relationships between the related meanings of the different terms.

The Component of Meaning

The meaning of the word meaning still becomes a puzzle. There is no exact definition of the word meaning. It is stated in Leech (1981) that Semanticists spend a long time to puzzle out the meaning of meaning (p. 1). However, the important thing is that the meaning of words helps language users to understand language since words are composed into phrases and sentences in which those are related to context.

As what has been stated earlier that a word may have more than one meaning and the distinctive components that a word has can be found to gain the number of meaning. It is in line with Palmer (1976, p. 85) in which a number of distinct components gained from

the meaning of a word can give the result of the entire list of meaning from a word. In short, these distinctive components can help to distinguish meanings of a lexical item that may appear in the same semantic field.

Leech (1981, p. 9) proposes seven types of meaning. Those are (1) conceptual meaning that is commonly known as denotative or cognitive meaning, (2) connotative meaning in which it is implied by the feature based on the thing referred, (3) social meaning in which the language used is connected to the social situations, (4) affective meaning in which it is portrayed based on the feelings and attitudes of the speaker, (5) reflected meaning whereby the lexical item is related to more than one sense of the same expression, (6) collocative meaning that is denoted through words that appear in common use with the other word, (7) thematic meaning which denotes how the message is organized.

Therefore, to determine the meaning, each lexical item that appears in the same semantic field must be contrasted to obtain the componential features. Nida (1975, p. 31) states that "meaning of words have meaning only in terms of systematic contrasts with other words which share certain features with them but contrast with them in respect to other features." The contrastive componential analysis is to find the distinctive features in which each lexical item is contrasted.

The term, components, here is classified into two types proposed by Nida (1975, p. 32). Those are the common component and diagnostic component. The common component is the central component that all lexemes in the same semantic field share, while the diagnostic component is the distinctive components that can help to distinguish the meaning of lexemes from the same semantic field.

The Types of Relations between Related Meanings of Different Terms

There are four principal ways in which the meanings of different semantic units may be related to one another (Nida, 1975, p. 15). Those four principal ways are known as inclusion, overlapping, complementation, and

contiguity. Firstly, inclusion is also called hypernym and hyponym in which the meaning of one word may be included within the meaning of another. The example can be clearly seen in a word like colour. Colour may include red and red may include vermilion.

Secondly, overlapping is also known as the synonym in which it can be said that they are not exactly the same in meaning, but they have a tendency to overlap in meaning. To make it clear, we can take for example the word ill, which is in pair with the word sick. Moreover, the word answer is the synonym of reply.

Thirdly, complementation is normally known as antonym in which the meaning shows certain marked contrasts and often opposite meanings. The examples of complementation are good, which is in contrast with bad, lend the antonym of borrow, and married in the opposite of single.

At last, contiguity is the most important for the analysis of the distinctive features of meaning. It presents the related meanings of certain related words. They may share some particular features, for example, the feature of movement may take the related meanings of run, walk, hop, skip, and crawl.

Componential Analysis

The componential analysis is used in a semantic study to discover the semantic components of a word. Nida (1975) defines componential analysis as “part of the analysis of a text which aims at discovering and organizing the semantic components of the words (p. 229).” Aitchison (2003) adds that discovering the smaller units of Lexis or minimal components can be done using componential analysis (p. 92).

Furthermore, the componential analysis is used to distinguish the meaning of lexemes that are in the same domain. To distinguish the meanings, the contrastive analysis in which the lexemes are contrasted each other can be done. By contrasting the lexemes, the distinctive feature can be found. Leech (1976, p. 98) states “as a distinctive technique,

componential analysis first involved in anthropological linguistics as a means of studying relations between kinship terms, but it has since proved its usefulness in many spheres of meaning”.

Therefore, the analysis to define the meaning of a word can be done by a set of semantic marking using (+) or (-) as the semantic signs (Nida, 1975, p. 131). The semantic sign “+” means that the feature is present, while the semantic sign “-” means that the feature is absent. The best example to understand this is by having the analysis in the human race. This analysis will be clearly shown in table 1.

Table 1 Component of Meaning

	[human]	[adult]	[male]
Man	+	+	+
Woman	+	+	-
Boy	+	-	+
Girl	+	-	-

The semantic domains such as men, women, boy, girl can be distinguished by contrasting each lexeme and later the componential features will be obtained. The componential features for the human race are human, adult, and male. Take for example the componential features of man are + [human] + [adult] + [male], while componential features for women are + [human] + [adult] - [male].

Linguistic Basis for Componential Analysis

In the componential analysis, the actual linguistic procedures are employed. According to Nida (1975, p. 64), there are four actual linguistic procedures employed in the componential analysis. Those are naming, paraphrasing, defining, and classifying. Those actual linguistic procedures will be explained in detail as in Nida (1975, p. 64).

Naming is the process in which it is in certain respect similar to reference, even though the perception might be different. In addition, reference is commonly understood as the relation founded between linguistic unit and a referent.

Paraphrasing is significant in a linguistic function in which the distinctive features of any semantic unit can be discovered. There are two different types of semantic units in paraphrasing. The first one is a core unit and the other one is some expressions that incorporate core units into paraphrases.

Defining is the process that seems to be similar to paraphrasing. Defining becomes the highly specific form of paraphrase and it turns out that this term is not often applied in any language situation. Defining itself is in the process of turning the arrangement of combining all paraphrases into one statement based on the particular meaning from the diagnostic components.

Classifying is never merely a process of putting referents into conceptual piles. It involves three procedures. Those are (1) collecting the units that share the same features, (2) separating the units that are different, and (3) deciding the basis of grouping.

Methodology

The type of this study is the semantic study as it is related to the study of meaning and focuses on finding the distinctive features of the verb *to love*. The aims of this study are to find the distinctive features to distinguish the lexical items which have similar meanings with *to love* and to explain polysemy of the verb *to love* which will be easily found by comparing the features and the meanings of *to love*.

In order to reach the research goals of this study, the componential analysis was used to analyse the English verb *to love*. To analyse the data, a set of procedures was taken. The first step was collecting the synonyms that have related meanings with *to love*. From the data, 16 (sixteen) synonyms of the verb *to love* were found. Those were taken from both online and offline dictionaries as well as a thesaurus. After collecting the synonyms of *to love*, the second step was contrasting each lexical item to another to find the distinctive features. When a feature was present in a lexical item, it was given a mark. Instead of

using semantic signs like “+” or “-”, I used check (√) to mark the features. The third step was finding the polysemy of *to love* to see the usage in context. Polysemy is a word which has more than one related meanings, so to obtain the polysemy of *to love* I looked at the dictionary to find the meanings of *to love* itself. After obtaining the meanings in the dictionary, I compared the meanings with the features to figure out the polysemy of *to love*.

Findings and Discussions

In this part, there are two main sections to discuss. The first one is about the findings and the descriptions of the distinctive features of the English verb *to love* and the other one is about the explanation of polysemy found in the verb *to love*.

The Distinctive Features of the English Verb “to love”

From the data collected, there are sixteen English verbs that are synonymous with the English verb *to love*. Those are cherish, prize, treasure, dig, adore, worship, fancy, like, relish, savour, idolize, admire, revere, dote on, prefer, and caress. Those English verbs share some particular meanings. Even though they are synonymous and share some meanings, they are not exactly the same. There are some 29 distinctive features that can distinguish them. Those will be discussed as the following seven major features.

Degree of Intensity

The degree of intensity is the feature that distinguishes the lexical items based on the level of affection. It is divided into three features. Those are [high], [medium], and [low]. *To cherish, to treasure, to adore, to worship, to idolize, to revere, to dote on, and to caress* are the verbs when you want to express love with your full heart. It means that their degrees of affection are + [high]. In contrast, if you want to express your feeling, not in depth feeling, the verbs like *to dig, to fancy, to like, to relish, to savour, and to prefer* are best expressed. Those verbs do not need an in-depth feeling of love to express since their degrees of affection are + [low]. The verbs like

to prize and *to admire* are classified in a medium degree of affection since those verbs may have the possibility *to love* something or someone so much or even less.

Objects

We often use love for three: (1) love for a significant other, (2) love for family, and (3) love of things. However, in this part, the lexical items which have related meanings with the verb *to love* can be distinguished by the objects, which will be divided into three big features, (1) love for human, (2) love for God, and (3) love of things.

If we want to express love for a human, a verb like *to cherish*, *to prize*, *to adore*, *to worship*, *to fancy*, *to like*, *to idolize*, *to admire*, *to revere*, *to dote on* and *to caress* can be expressed. *To idolize*, *to dote on* and *to caress* are only used specifically for uttering affection addressed only for human. Those cannot be uttered for things. Moreover, the features that can distinguish those verbs are that love can be expressed for family and for God. *To cherish*, *to adore*, *to worship* and *to caress* are the verbs of *to love* which people express their affection for their family members, while *to adore*, *to worship*, and *to idolize* are best expressed for God.

To cherish, *to treasure*, *to dig*, *to adore*, *to worship*, *to fancy*, *to like*, *to relish*, *to savour*, *to admire*, *to revere*, *to prefer* are the verbs which express love for things like food, or inanimate objects. However, *to treasure*, *to dig*, *to relish*, *to savour*, *to prefer* are only used in expressing feeling love of things. Those cannot be expressed for people. Specifically, *to relish* and *to savour* are uttered for expressing interest in things, especially food. *To relish* is expressed of liking food such as the taste of food, while *to savour* is uttered for taste and smell in food. *To savour* itself can be specifically used to express like of experience. In other words, *to savour* shows the enjoyment of some particular actions or events that some particular persons have experienced. It would be different from the verb *to admire*. That verb can also be used for expressing love of things but it indicates some particular persons who love other persons' behaviour.

Therefore, in general, there are also some lexical items, which express love for human and love for things. Those are *to cherish*, *to prize*, *to adore*, *to worship*, *to fancy*, *to like*, *to admire* and *to revere*. The differences are that *to cherish* and *to caress* are the verbs for uttering love only for family, while *to adore* and *to worship* are the verbs for expressing love for both family and God.

Actions

The action feature is aimed to see how people who express their affection treat other persons that are addressed. How people treat someone else in which they also express their love can be explained in five features. Those are protecting, caring, kissing in a gentle way, treating with affection, and touching in a tender. However, not all lexical items include these treatments. Those lexical items are only expressing love without any action in it.

The verbs like *to cherish*, *to treasure*, and *to caress* do not only express affection to someone else but also include some particular action in it. *To cherish* is a verb, which utters affection with protecting, caring, and treating with affection without kissing in a gentle way and touching in a tender to the addressed persons. *To treasure* can express affection only for things in which people will also protect and care the things being loved. At last, *to caress* is used to express love only for human, especially family members, with the action like kissing in a gentle way, treating with affection, and touching in a tender without protecting and caring the addressed persons.

Functions

The feature of function is to indicate that in expressing love, there are some functions embedded in it. Another six features that will be the distinctive features of the lexical items that are related to the meanings of *to love* distinguish those functions. Those six features are value, respect, approve, take pleasure, admire, and choose.

The function of *to prize* and *to treasure* is to value. *To prize* is to value both human and things, while *to treasure* is only to value things. *To dig* has functions to respect and take

pleasure of something. *To adore* and *to admire* have functions which are almost the same as *to dig*. The difference is that *to adore* functions to respect, take pleasure, and admire someone or something, while *to admire* has function to approve or agree with something. *To worship* has functions to respect and to admire someone or something, while *to fancy*, *to relish*, and *to savour* are only for taking pleasure. The difference is that *to fancy* is taking pleasure in someone's appearance, like the beauty and the shape of a body, while *to relish* and *to savour* are taking pleasure for food like the smell or the taste. *To like* has the same function as *to fancy*. The difference is that *to like* has other function like to approve or agree with something.

Moreover, *to idolize* and *to revere* have functions to respect and admire. However, *to idolize* functions to respect and admire only for someone or God, while *to revere* functions to respect and admire not only someone but also things. *To dote on* is only for admiring someone. *To prefer* has only one function that is to choose something in which people interested in more.

Reasons

This feature is to identify the reasons why people express their affection. It can be divided into three features. Those are the reasons because the addressed people or things are valuable, perfect, and sexually attractive. However, not all lexical items have reasons for expressing their affection. Those are uttered purely for expressing what they love.

The lexical items that have reasons *to love* are *to cherish*, *to prize*, *to treasure*, *to fancy*, *to admire*, and *to dote on*. The reason of *to cherish*, *to prize*, and *to treasure* is because the related persons or the related things are valuable. *To fancy* and *to admire* are uttered in expressing love because some particular person is considered as sexually attractive, while *to dote on* is expressing love because the addressed person is considered as a perfect person.

Degree of Unconditionality

By taking a look at the degree of unconditionality, we can see the features like higher or lower the degree that may distinguish the lexical items. *To cherish*, *to treasure*, *to admire*, *to worship*, *to idolize*, *to dote on*, and *to caress* are the verbs for expressing affection that has a higher degree of unconditionality. By uttering those verbs, it means that people love something or someone without condition. They love them just the way they are. No matter how bad the persons are, they will always love them.

In contrast, the verbs like *to prize*, *to dig*, *to fancy*, *to like*, *to relish*, *to savour*, *to admire*, *to revere*, *to prefer* are for expressing affection in a lower degree of unconditionality. It means that something or someone that can change their feeling toward what they love may influence interlocutors who utter these verbs in expressing their love. Besides, they may be influenced by the time in which as the time goes by their feeling of love what they loved is faded away.

Styles

Language is related to styles whether it is informal or formal. Almost all of the lexical items of *to love* can be used in both styles, formal and informal, except *to dig* and *to fancy*. *To dig* is an old-fashioned slang, for example in these sentences (1) *Hey, I really dig your bag!* (2) *You dig my words, man?*, while *to fancy* is mainly the UK informal language to show that people are sexually attracted to someone, for example, *She could say she fancied him*.

The Polysemy of "to love"

From the data, there are six polysemy of *to love*. Those are to agree or approve something very much, to respect something very much, to enjoy or take pleasure on something very much, to feel comfortable on something very much, to like very much, and to want something very much. It means that the verb *to love* does not only have one meaning, but it may have several meanings based on the context.

The first meaning of *to love* can be to agree or approve something very much. The example of this is *I love your idea*. It means that the person does not only like the idea but also agree with someone's idea. The second meaning is to respect something very much. The examples are *If you love revolution, you love black nationalism* and *Show proper respect to everyone: love the brotherhood of believers*. From these sentences, the sense is not only to liken but also to show respect for some particular situations or things.

The third meaning of *to love* can be identified as to enjoy or take pleasure on something very much, for example, *The kids love feeding bread to the ducks*. It means that other than like, the kids also enjoy what they are doing. The fourth meaning is to feel comfortable with something very much, for examples *I love my new life here* and *You will love it there*. Instead of liking someone, in those sentences, they can be identified that they have had a good and cozy feeling of staying. The fifth meaning is to like something or someone very much, for examples *I love your house*, *She loves the food*, *I love this car*, and *I love those kids*. It means that the person has felt pleased with something or someone being liked. The last meaning of *to love* is to indicate that a person wants something very much. The example is *I love you to come*. It means that the person who invites someone feels pleased if the person being invited come to the invitation.

Final Remarks

Come to an end, it can be concluded that the English verb *to love* has sixteen lexical items, which share similar meanings. Those are *to cherish*, *to prize*, *to treasure*, *to dig*, *to adore*, *to worship*, *to fancy*, *to like*, *to relish*, *to savour*, *to idolize*, *to admire*, *to revere*, *to dote on*, *to prefer*, and *to caress*. Those lexical items are contrasted one to the other one to obtain the features that will distinguish the lexical items. As a result, there are 29 distinctive features that are classified into seven major features. It means that the lexical items which share related meanings with English verb *to love* can be distinguished by looking at the

distinctive features such as the degree of intensity, the addressed objects, the implied actions, the functions, the reasons of loving, the degree of unconditionality, and the styles of language.

After the distinctive features are obtained, the polysemy of *to love* can be gained. To find the polysemy, the meanings of *to love* found in the dictionaries are compared to the features that have been found. From the data, there are six polysemy of *to love*. Those are *to love* to agree or approve something very much, to respect something very much, to enjoy or take pleasure on something very much, to feel comfortable on something very much, to like very much, and to want something very much. By these meanings, it indicates that the verb *to love* can have more than one meaning.

References

- Aitchison, Jane. (2003). *Linguistic*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd.
- Cambridge Dictionary. (2018). Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>
- English Oxford Living Dictionaries. (2018). Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/>
- Leech, Geoffrey. (1981). *Semantics: The Study of Meaning*. Second Edition. Suffolk: The Chaucer Press.
- Longman Dictionary Online. (2018). Retrieved from <http://global.longmandictionaries.com/>
- Merriam-Webster. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>
- Nida, Eugene Albert. (1975). *Componential Analysis of Meaning*. Paris: The Hague.
- Palmer, Frank Robert. (1983). *Semantics*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.