

External and internal factors of semantic change essay



The development and change of the semantic structure of a word is always a source of qualitative and quantitative development of the vocabulary. All the types discussed depend upon some comparison between the earlier (whether extinct or still in use) and the new meaning of the given word.

This comparison may be based on the difference between notions expressed or referents in the real world that are pointed out, on the type of psychological association at work, on evaluation of the latter by the speaker or, possibly, on some other feature. The order in which various types are described will follow more or less closely the diachronic classifications of M. Breal and H. Paul.

No attempt at a new classification is considered necessary. There seems to be no point in augmenting the number of unsatisfactory schemes already offered in literature. The treatment is therefore traditional. M. Breal was probably the first to emphasize the fact that in passing from general usage into some special sphere of communication a word as a rule undergoes some sort of specialisation of its meaning.

The word *case*, for instance, alongside its general meaning of 'circumstances in which a person or a thing is' possesses special meanings: in law ('a law suit'), in grammar (e. g. the Possessive case), in medicine ('a patient', 'an illness'). Compare the following: One of Charles's cases had been a child ill with a form of diphtheria.

(C. P. SNOW) (case = a patient). The Solicitor whom I met at the Holfords' sent me a case which any young man at my stage would have thought himself lucky to get. Idem) (case = a question decided, in a court of law, a

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law suit) /5, 128/ The general, not specialized meaning is also very frequent in present-day English. For example: At last we tiptoed up the broad slippery staircase, and went to our rooms.

But in my case not to sleep, immediately at least. (Idem) (case = circumstances in which one is) This difference is revealed in the difference of contexts in which these words occur, in their different valency. Words connected with illnesses and medicine in the first example, and words connected with law and court procedures in the second, form the semantic paradigm of the word case. The word play suggests different notions to a child, a playwright, a footballer, a musician or a chess-player and has in their speech different semantic paradigms.

The same applies to the noun cell as used by a biologist, an electrician, a nun or a representative of the law; or the word gas as understood by a chemist, a housewife, a motorist or a miner. /3, 27/ In all the examples considered above a word which formerly represented a notion of a broader scope has come to render a notion of a narrower scope. When the meaning is specialized, the word can name fewer objects, i. e. have fewer referents.

At the same time the content of the notion is being enriched, as it includes -a greater number of relevant features by which the notion is characterized. Or as St. Ullmann puts it: " The word is now applicable to more things but tells us less about them. " The reduction of scope accounts for the term " narrowing of the meaning" which is even more often used than the term " specialization". We shall avoid the term " narrowing", since it is somewhat

misleading. Actually it is neither the meaning nor the notion, but the scope of the notion that .

is narrowed. There is also a third term for the same phenomenon, namely “differentiation”, but it is not so widely used as the first two terms. /9, 72/ H. Paul, as well as many other authors, emphasizes the fact that this type of semantic change is particularly frequent in vocabulary of professional and trade groups.

H. Paul's examples are from the German language but it is very easy to find parallel cases in English. So this type of change is fairly universal and fails to disclose any specifically English properties. The best known examples of specialization in the general language are as follows: OE *deor* 'wild beast' > ModE *deer* 'wild rum, inant of a particular species' (the original meaning was still alive in Shakespeare's time as is proved by the following quotation: Rats and mice and such small deer); OE *mete* 'food' ; gt; ModE *meat* 'edible flesh', i. e.

only a particular species of food (the earlier meaning is still noticeable in the compound *sweetmeat*). This last example deserves special attention because the tendency of fixed context to preserve the original meaning is very marked as is constantly proved by various examples. Other well-worn examples are: OE *fu? ol* 'bird' (cf. Germ *Vogel*) ; gt; ModE *foal* 'domestic birds'. The old, meaning is still preserved in poetic diction and in set expressions, like *fowls of the air*.

Among its derivatives, *fowler* means 'a person who shoots or traps wild birds for sport or food'; the shooting or trapping itself is called *fowling*; a *fowling*
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piece is a gun. OE *hund* 'dog' (cf. Germ *Hund*) ; *gt*; *hound* 'a species of hunting dog'. Many words connected with literacy also show similar changes: thus, *teach*; *It*; OE *t? can* 'to show', 'to teach'; *write* ; *It*; OE *writan* 'to write', 'to scratch', 'to score' (cf.

Germ *rei? en*); *It*; writing in Europe had first the form of scratching on the bark of the trees. Tracing these semantic changes the scholars can, as it were, witness the development of culture. In the above examples the new meaning superseded the earlier one. Both meanings can also coexist in the structure of a polysemantic word or be differentiated locally.

The word *token* ; *It*; OE *tace*, | Germ *Zeichen* originally had the broad meaning of 'sign'. The semantic change that occurred in it illustrates systematic interdependence within the vocabulary elements. Brought into competition with the borrowed word *sign* it became restricted in use to a few cases of fixed context (a love token, a token of respect, a token vote, a token payment) and consequently restricted in meaning. In present-day English *token* means something small, unimportant or cheap which represents something big, important or valuable. Other examples of specialization are *room*, which alongside the new meaning keeps the old one of 'space'; *corn* originally meaning 'grain', 'the seed of any cereal plant': locally the word becomes specialized and is understood to denote the leading crop of the district; hence in England *corn* means 'wheat', in Scotland 'oats', whereas in the USA, as an ellipsis for Indian corn, it came to mean 'maize'. As a special group belonging to the same type one can mention the formation of proper nouns from common nouns chiefly in toponymies, i.

e. lace names. For instance, the City,— the business part of London; the Highlands — the mountainous part of Scotland; Oxford — University town in England from ox+ford, i. e. a place where oxen could ford the river; the Tower (of London) — originally a fortress and palace, later a state prison, now a museum. /5, 98/ In the above examples the change of meaning occurred without change of sound form and without any intervention of morphological processes.

In many cases, however, the two processes, semantic and morphological, go hand in hand. For instance, when considering the effect of the agent suffix -ist added to the noun stem art- we might expect the whole to mean any person occupied in art, a representative of any kind of art, but usage specializes the meaning of the word artist and restricts it to a synonym of painter. The process reverse to specialisation is termed generalisation and widening of meaning. In that case the scope of the new notion is wider than that of the original one (hence widening), whereas the content of the notion is poorer. In most cases generalisation is combined with a higher order of abstraction than in the notion expressed by the earlier meaning. The transition from a concrete meaning to an abstract one is a most frequent feature in the semantic history of words.

The change may be explained as occasioned by situations in which not all the features of the notions rendered are of equal importance for the message. Thus, ready ; It; OE r? de (a derivative of the verb ridan ' to ride') meant ' prepared for a ride'. Fly originally meant ' to move through the air with wings'; now it denotes any kind of movement in the air or outer space and also very quick movement in any medium. The process went very far in <https://assignbuster.com/external-and-internal-factors-of-semantic-change-essay/>

the word thing with its original meanings 'cause', ' object', ' decision', ' meeting', and ' the decision of the meeting', ' that which was decided upon'. (Cf.

Norwegian *storting* ' parliament'.) At present, as a result of this process of generalisation, the word can substitute nearly any noun, and receives an almost pronominal force. In fact all the words belonging to the group of generic terms fall into this category of generalization. By generic terms we shall mean non-specific, non-distributive terms applicable to a great number ; of individual members of a big class of words.

The grammatical meaning of this class of words becomes predominant in their semantic components. Notice the very general, character of the word *business* in the following: " Donald hasn't a very good manner of interviews. "—" All this good-manner business," Clun said, " they take far too much notice of it now in my opinion" (A. WILSON) /10, 78/ It is sometimes difficult to distinguish the instances of generalization proper from generalization combined with a fading of lexical meaning ousted by the grammatical or emotional meaning that take its place. These phenomena are closely connected with the peculiar characteristics of grammatical structure typical of each individual language.

One observes them, for instance, studying the semantic history of the English auxiliary and semi-auxiliary verbs, especially *have*, *do*, *shall*, *will*, *turn*, *go*, and that of some English prepositions and adverbs which in the course of time have come to express grammatical relations. The weakening of lexical meaning due to the influence of emotional force is revealed in such

words as awfully, terribly, terrific, smashing. Following the lead of literary criticism linguists have often adopted terms of rhetoric for the types of semantic change, besides metaphor and metonymy. These are: hyperbole, litotes, irony, e u p h e m i s m.

In all these cases the same warning that was given in connection with metaphors and metonymy must be kept in mind: namely, there is a difference between these terms as understood in literary criticism and in lexicology. Hyperbole (from Gr huperballo 'exceed') is an exaggerated statement not meant to be understood literally but expressing an intensely emotional attitude of the speaker to what he is speaking about. The emotional tone is due to the illogical character in which the direct denotative and the contextual emotional meanings are combined. A very good example is chosen by I. R. Galperin from Byron, and one cannot help borrowing it: When people say "I've told you fifty times," They mean to scold and very often do, The reader will note that Byron's intonation is distinctly colloquial, the poet is giving us his observations concerning colloquial expressions, So the .

hyperbole here is not poetic but linguistic. The same may be said about expressions like: It's absolutely maddening, You'll be the death of me, I hate troubling you, It's monstrous, It's a nightmare, A thousand pardons, A thousand thanks, Haven't seen you for ages, I'd give the world to, I shall be eternally grateful, I'd love to do it, etc. The most important difference between a poetic hyperbole and a linguistic one lies in the fact that the former creates an image, whereas in the latter the denotative meaning quickly fades out and the corresponding exaggerating words serve only as <https://assignbuster.com/external-and-internal-factors-of-semantic-change-essay/>

general signs of emotion without specifying the emotion itself. Some of the most frequent emphatic words are: absolutely! awfully! terribly! lovely! magnificent! splendid! and so on. /14, 54/ The reverse figure is called litotes (from Gr litos 'plain', 'meagre') or understatement.

It might be defined as expressing the affirmative by the negation of its contrary: e. g. not bad or not half bad for 'good', not small for 'great', no coward for 'brave'.

Some understatements do not contain negations: rather decent; I could do with a cup of tea. It is, however, doubtful whether litotes should be considered under the heading of semantic change at all, because as a rule it creates no permanent change in the semantic structure of the word concerned. The purpose of understatement is not to deceive but to produce a stronger impression on the hearer. Also taken from rhetoric is the term irony, i. e.

expression of one's meaning by words of opposite meaning, especially a simulated adoption of the opposite point of view for the purpose of ridicule. One of the meanings of the adjective nice is 'bad', 'unsatisfactory'; it is marked off as ironical and illustrated by the example: You've got us into a nice mess! The same may be said about the adjective pretty: A pretty mess you've made of it! Changes depending on the social attitude to the object named, connected with social evaluation and emotional tone, are called amelioration and pejoration of meaning. Amelioration or elevation is a semantic shift undergone by words due to their referents coming up the social scale. For instance OE *cwen* 'a woman' > ModE *queen*, OE *cniht* 'a

young servant' > ModE knight. The words steward and stewardess (the passengers' attendant on ships and airliners) have undergone a great amelioration.

Steward ; It; OE stigweard from stigo ' a sty' and weard ' a ward', dates back from the days when the chief wealth of the Saxon landowner was his pigs, of whom the stigweard had to take care. The meaning of some words has been elevated through associations with aristocratic life or town life. This is true about such adjectives as civil, chivalrous, urbane. 6, 97/ The reverse process is pejoration or degradation; it involves a lowering in social scale connected with the appearance of a derogatory and scornful emotive tone reflecting the disdain of the upper classes towards the lower ones. A knave ; It; OE cnafa Germ Knabe meant at first ' boy', then ' servant', and finally became a term of abuse and scorn. Another example of the same kind is blackguard.

In the lord's retinue of Middle Ages served among others the guard of iron pots and other kitchen utensils black with soot. From the immoral features attributed to these servants by their masters comes the present scornful ' meaning of the word blackguard. A similar history is traced for the words boor, churl, clown, villain. Euphemism (Gr euphemismos from eu ' well' and pHEME ' speak') is the substitution of words of mild or vague connotations for expressions rough, unpleasant or for some other reasons unmentionable. /3/ Within the diachronic approach the phenomenon has been repeatedly classed by many linguists as taboo.

This standpoint is hardly acceptable for modern European languages. With primitive peoples taboo is a prohibition meant as a safeguard against

supernatural forces. Names of ritual objects or animals were taboo because the name was regarded as the equivalent of what was named. S. Ullmann returns to the conception - of taboo several times illustrating it with propitiatory names given in the early periods of language development to such objects of superstitious fear as the bear (whose name originally meant 'brown') and the weasel. He treats both examples as material of comparative semantics.

The taboo influence behind the circumlocutions used to name these animals becomes quite obvious when the same phenomenon is observed in similar names in various other languages. There is no necessity to cite them here as they are given in any book on general linguistics. It should be borne in mind that taboo has historical relevance. No such opposition as that between a direct and a propitiatory name for an animal, no matter how dangerous, can be found in present-day English. With peoples of developed culture, euphemism is intrinsically different, has nothing to do with taboo and is dictated by social usage, moral tact and etiquette. Cf.

queer 'mad', deceased 'dead', perspire v 'sweat'. From the semantical point of view euphemism is important because meanings with unpleasant connotations appear in words formerly neutral, as a result of their repeated use instead of other words that are for some reason unmentionable. The material of this chapter shows that semantic changes are not arbitrary. They proceed in accordance with the logical and psychological laws of thought, otherwise changed words would never be understood and could not serve the purpose of communication. The various attempts at classification

undertaken by traditional linguistics, although inconsistent (and often <https://assignbuster.com/external-and-internal-factors-of-semantic-change-essay/>

subjective, are useful, since they permit the linguist to find his way about an immense accumulation of semantic facts.

However, they say nothing or almost nothing about the causes of these changes. II. FACTORS OF SEMANTIC CHANGE In comparison with classifications of semantic change the problem of their causes appears neglected. Opinions on this point are scattered through a great number of linguistic works and have apparently never been collected into anything complete. And yet a thorough understanding of the phenomena involved. In semantic change is impossible unless the whys and wherefores become known.

This is of primary importance as it may lead eventually to a clearer, interpretation of language development. The vocabulary is the most flexible part of the language and it is precisely its semantic aspect that responds most readily to every change in the human activity in whatever sphere it may happen to take place. The factors of semantic changes may be grouped under two main headings, internal and external ones. Of these the first group has suffered much greater neglect in the past and it is not surprising therefore that far less is known of it than of the second. It deals with changes due to the constant interdependence of vocabulary units in language and speech, such as differentiation between synonyms, changes taking place in connection with ellipsis and with fixed contexts, changes resulting from ambiguity in certain contexts, and some other cases. Semantic change due to the differentiation of synonyms is a gradual change observed in the course of language history, sometimes, but not necessarily, involving the semantic assimilation of loan words.

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Consider, for example, the words time and tide. They used to be synonyms. Then tide took on its more limited application to the periodically shifting waters, and time alone is used in the general sense. /1, 85/ Another example of semantic change involving synonymic differentiation is the word twist. In OE it was a noun, meaning ' a rope' whereas the verb thrawan (now throw) meant both ' hurl' and ' twist'. Since the appearance in the Middle English of the verb twisten (' twist') the first verb lost this meaning.

But threw in its turn influenced the development of casten (cast), a Scandinavian borrowing. Its primary meaning ' hurl', ' throw' is now present only in some set expressions. Cast keeps its old meaning in such phrases as cast a glance, cast lots, cast smth. in one's teeth. Twist has very many meanings, the latest being ' to dance the twist' Fixed context may be regarded as another internal factor in semantic change.

Both factors are at work in the case of token. When brought into competition with the loan word sign, it became restricted in use to a number of set expressions such as love token, token of respect and so became specialized in meaning. Fixed context has this influence not only in phrases but in compound words as well. OE mete meant ' food', its descendant meat refers only to flesh food except in the set expression meat and drink and the compound sweetmeats. No systematic treatment has so far been offered for the syntagmatic semantic changes depending on the context.

But such cases do exist showing that investigation of the problem is important. /8, 112/ One of these is ellipsis. The qualifying words of a frequent phrase may be omitted: sale comes to be used for cut-price sale, propose for

to propose marriage, to be expecting for to be expecting a baby. Or vice versa, the kernel word of the phrase may seem redundant: minerals for mineral waters. Due to ellipsis starve which originally meant 'die' (cf.

Germ sterben) came to substitute the whole phrase die of hunger, and also began to mean 'suffer from lack of food' and even in colloquial use 'to feel hungry'. Moreover as there are many words with transitive and intransitive variants naming cause and result, starve came to mean 'to cause to perish with hunger'. English has a great variety of these regular coincidences of different aspects, alongside with cause and result, we could consider the coincidence of subjective and objective, active and passive aspects especially frequent in adjectives. E.

g. hateful means 'exciting hatred' and 'full of hatred'; curious—'strange' and 'inquisitive'; pitiful— 'exciting compassion' and 'compassionate'.

Compare the different use of the words doubtful and healthy in the following: to be doubtful :: a doubtful advantage, to be healthy :: a healthy climate. 15, 164/ The external factors are determined by the social nature of the language: they are observed in changes of meaning resulting from the development of the notion expressed and the thing named and by the appearance of new notions and things. In other words, external factor of semantic change are connected with the development of the human mind as it moulds reality to conform with its needs. Languages are powerfully affected by social, political, economic, cultural and technical change.

The influence of those factors upon linguistic phenomena is studied by sociolinguistics. It shows that social factors can influence even structural

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features of linguistic units, terms of science, for instance, have a number of specific features as compared to words used in other spheres of human activity. The word being a linguistic realization of notion, it changes with the progress of human consciousness. This process is reflected in the development of lexical meaning. As the human mind achieves an ever more exact understanding of the world of reality and the objective relationships that characterize it, the notions become more and more exact reflections of real things.

The history of the social, economic and political life of people, the progress of culture and science bring about changes in notions and things influencing the semantic aspect of language. For instance, OE *eorpe* meant 'the ground under people's feet', 'the soil' and 'the world of man' as opposed to heaven that was supposed to be inhabited first by Gods and later on, with the spread of Christianity, by God, his saints and the souls of the dead. With the progress of science earth came to mean the third planet from the sun and the knowledge of it was constantly enriched. 4, 17/ The word *space* from the meanings of 'extension' or 'intervening distance' came to mean 'the limitless expanse in which everything exists' and more recently came to be used especially in the meaning of 'outer space'.

Atoms (Gr. *atomos* 'indivisible' from a 'not' and *tomos* 'cut') were formerly thought to be indivisible smallest particles of matter and were usually associated in layman's speech with smallness. The word could be metaphorically used in the meaning of 'a tiny creature'. When atoms were found to be made up of a positively charged nucleus round which negatively charged electrons revolve, the notion of an atom brought about connotations

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of discrete (discontinuous) character of matter. With the advances made since science has found ways of releasing the energy hidden in the splitting of the atomic nucleus, the notion is accompanied with the idea of immense potentialities present, as, for instance, in the phrase Atoms for peace.

Since the advent of the atomic bomb the adjective atomic distinctly connotes in the English language with the threat of a most destructive warfare (atomic bomb, atomic warfare). The tendency to use technical imagery is increasing in every language, thus the expression to spark off in chain reaction is almost international. Some expressions tend to become somewhat obsolete: the English used to talk of people being galvanized into activity, or going full steam ahead but the phrases sound out dated now. The changes of notions and things named go hand in hand.

As they are conditioned by changes in the economic, social, political and cultural history of the people, the external factors of semantic change might be conveniently subdivided in accordance with these. Social relationships are at work in the cases of elevation and pejoration of meaning discussed in the previous section where the attitude of the upper classes to their social inferiors determined the strengthening of emotional tone among the semantic components of the word. Euphemisms may be dictated by publicity needs—hence ready-tailored and ready-to-wear clothes instead of ready-made. The influence of mass-advertising on language is growing; it is felt in every level of the language.

Innovations possible in advertising are of many different types. A kind of orange juice, for instance, is called Tango. The justification of the name is

given in the advertising text as follows: Get this different tasting Sparkling Tango. Tell you why: made from whole oranges.

Taste those oranges. Taste the tang in Tango. Tingling tang, bubbles—sparks. You drink it straight. Goes down great.

Taste the tang in Tango. New Sparkling Tango. The reader will see for himself how many expressive connotations are introduced by the salesman in this commercial name in an effort to attract the buyer's attention.

Economic causes are obviously at work in the semantic development of the word wealth. It first meant 'well-being', 'happiness' from weal from OE wela whence well.

This original meaning is preserved in the compounds commonwealth and commonweal. The present meaning became possible due to the role played by money both in feudal and bourgeois society. The chief wealth of the early inhabitants of Europe being the cattle, OE feoh means both 'cattle' and 'money', likewise Goth faihu; Lat. pecu meant 'cattle' and pecunia meant 'money'.

ME fee-house is both a cattle-shed and a treasury. The present-day English fee most frequently means the price paid for services to a lawyer or a physician. It appears to develop jointly from the above mentioned OE feoh and the Anglo-French fe, fie, fief, probably of the same origin, meaning 'a recompense' and 'a feudal tenure'. This modern meaning is obvious in the following example: Physicians of the utmost Fame/Were called at once; but when they came/ They answered as they took their fees,/ " There is no cure for this disease.

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" (BELLOC) /1, 85/ 2. 1. Internal (linguistic) factors of semantic change In the earlier stages of its development semasiology was a purely diachronic science dealing mainly with changes in the word meaning and classification of those changes. No satisfactory or universally accepted scheme of classification has ever been found, and this line of search seems to be abandoned.

In comparison with classifications of semantic change the problem of their factors appears neglected. Opinions on this point are scattered through a great number of linguistic works and have apparently never been collected into anything complete. And yet a thorough understanding of the phenomena involved in semantic change is impossible unless the whys and wherefores become known. This is of primary importance as it may lead eventually to a clearer interpretation of language development. The vocabulary is the most flexible part of the language and it is precisely its semantic aspect that responds most readily to every change in the human activity in whatever sphere it may happen to take place. The factors of semantic changes may be grouped under two main headings, internal (linguistic) and external (extralinguistic) ones, of these the first group has suffered much greater neglect in the past and it is not surprising therefore that far less is known of it than of the second.

Internal factors influencing the process of vocabulary adaptation may be of paradigmatic and syntagmatic character; in dealing with them we have to do with the constant interaction and interdependence of vocabulary units in language and speech, such as differentiation between synonyms, changes taking place in connection with ellipsis and with fixed contexts, changes

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resulting from ambiguity in certain contexts, and some other causes.

Differentiation of synonyms is a gradual change observed in the course of language history, sometimes, but not necessarily, involving the semantic assimilation of loan words. Consider, for example, the words time and tide. They used to be synonyms. Then tide took on its more limited application to the shifting waters, and time alone is used in the general sense.

The word beast was borrowed from French into Middle English. Before it appeared the general word for animal was deer which after the word beast was introduced became narrowed to its present meaning ' a hoofed animal of which the males have antlers'. Somewhat later the Latin word animal was also borrowed, then the word beast was restricted, and its meaning served to separate the four-footed kind from all the other members of the animal kingdom. Thus, beast displaced deer and was in its turn itself displaced by the generic animal.

Another example of semantic change involving synonymic differentiation is the word twist. In OE it was a noun, meaning ' a rope', whereas the verb thrawan (now throw) meant both ' hurl' and ' twist' Since the appearance in the Middle English of the verb twisten (' twist') the first verb lost this meaning. But throw in its turn influenced the development of casten (cast), a Scandinavian borrowing. Its primary meaning ' hurl', ' throw' is now present only in some set expressions.

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internal factor in semantic change. Both factors are at work in the case of token. The noun token originally had the broad meaning of 'sign'.

When brought into competition with the loan word sign, it became restricted in use to a number of set expressions such as love token, token of respect and so became specialised in meaning. Fixed context has this influence not only in phrases but in compound words as well. No systematic treatment has so far been offered for the syntagmatic semantic changes depending on the context. But such cases do exist showing that investigation of the problem is important. One of these is ellipsis.

The qualifying words of a frequent phrase may be omitted: sale comes to be used for cut-price sale, propose for propose marriage, be expecting for be expecting a baby, media for mass media. Or vice versa the kernel word of the phrase may seem redundant: minerals for mineral waters, summit for summit meeting. 1 Due to ellipsis starve which originally meant 'to die' (|| Germ sterben) came to substitute the whole phrase die of hunger, and also began to mean 'to suffer from lack of food' and even in colloquial use 'to feel hungry'. Moreover as there are many words with transitive and intransitive variants naming cause and result, starve came to mean 'to cause to perish with hunger'. English has a great variety of these regular coincidences of different aspects, alongside with cause and result, we could consider the coincidence of subjective and objective, active and passive aspects especially frequent in adjectives. E.

g. hateful means 'exciting hatred' and 'full of hatred'; curious — 'strange' and 'inquisitive'; pitiful — 'exciting compassion' and 'compassionate'. One

can be doubtful about a doubtful question, in a healthy climate children are healthy. To refer to these cases linguists employ the term conversives. /15, 168/ 2. 2.

External (extralinguistic) factors of semantic change The external (extralinguistic) factors are determined by the social nature of the language: they are observed in changes of meaning resulting from the development of the notion expressed and the thing named and by the appearance of new notions and things. In other words, external causes of semantic change are connected with the development of the human mind as it moulds reality to conform with its needs. The external factors are determined by the social nature of the language: they are observed in changes of meaning resulting from the development of the notion expressed and the thing named and by the appearance of new notions and things. In other words, external causes of semantic change are connected with the development of the human mind as it moulds reality to conform with its needs.

Languages are powerfully affected by social, political, economic, cultural and technical change. The influence of those factors upon linguistic phenomena is studied by sociolinguistics. It shows that social factors can influence even structural features of linguistic units: terms of science, for instance, have a number of specific features as compared to words used in other spheres of human activity. The word being a linguistic realisation of notion, it changes with the progress of human consciousness. This process is reflected in the development of lexical meaning.

As the human mind achieves an ever more exact understanding of the world of reality and the objective relationships that characterise it, the notions become more and more exact reflections of real things. The history of the social, economic and political life of the people, the progress of culture and science bring about changes in notions and things influencing the semantic aspect of language. For instance, OE eorde meant ' the ground under people's feet', ' the soil' and ' the world of man' as opposed to heaven that was supposed to be inhabited first by Gods and later on, with the spread of Christianity, by God, his angels, saints and the souls of the dead. With the progress of science earth came to mean the third planet from the sun and the knowledge is constantly enriched. With the development of electrical engineering earth n means ' a connection of a wire conductor with the earth', either accidental (with the result of leakage of current) or intentional (as for the purpose of providing a return path). There is also a corresponding verb earth.

E. g. : With earthed appliances the continuity of the earth wire ought to be checked. The word space meant ' extent of time or distance' or ' intervening distance'.

Alongside this meaning a new meaning developed ' the limitless and indefinitely great expanse in which all material objects are located'. The phrase outer space was quickly ellipted into space. Cf. spacecraft, space-suit, space travel, etc. It is interesting to note that the English word cosmos was not exactly a synonym of outer space but meant ' the universe as an ordered system', being an antonym to chaos.

The modern usage is changing under the influence of the Russian language as a result of Soviet achievements in outer space. The OED Supplement points out that the adjective cosmic (in addition to the former meanings 'universal', 'immense') in modern usage under the influence of Russian ?????????? means 'pertaining to space travel', e. . cosmic rocket 'space rocket'.

The external motivation is sometimes obvious, but some cases are not as straightforward as they may look. The word bikini may be taken as an example. Bikini, a very scanty two-piece bathing suit worn by women, is named after Bikini atoll in the Western Pacific but not because it was first introduced on some fashionable beach there. Bikini appeared at the time when the atomic bomb tests by the US in the Bikini atoll were fresh in everybody's memory. The associative field is emotional referring to the "atomic" shock the first bikinis produced. The tendency to use technical imagery is increasing in every language, thus the expression to spark off in chain reaction is almost international.

Live wire 'one carrying electric current' used figuratively about a person of intense energy seems purely English, though. Other international expressions are black box and feed-back. Black box formerly a term of aviation and electrical engineering is now used figuratively to denote any mechanism performing intricate functions or any unit of which we know the effect but not the components or principles of action. Feed-back a cybernetic term meaning 'the return of a sample of the output of a system or process to the input, especially with the purpose of automatic adjustment and control' is now widely used figuratively meaning 'response'.

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Some technical expressions that were used in the first half of the 19th century tend to become obsolete: the English used to talk of people being galvanised into activity, or going full steam ahead but the phrases sound dated now. The changes of notions and things named go hand in hand. They are conditioned by changes in the economic, social, political and cultural history of the people, so that the external causes of semantic change might be conveniently subdivided in accordance with these. Social relationships are at work in the cases of elevation and pejoration of meaning discussed in the previous section where the attitude of the upper classes to their social inferiors determined the strengthening of emotional tone among the semantic components of the word. Sociolinguistics also teaches that power relationships are reflected in vocabulary changes.

In all the cases of pejoration that were mentioned above, such as boor, churl, villain, etc. , it was the ruling class that imposed evaluation. The opposite is rarely the case. One example deserves attention though: sir + -ly used to mean 'masterful' and now surly means 'rude in a bad-tempered way'. D.

Leith devotes a special paragraph in his "Social History of English" to the semantic disparagement of women. He thinks that power relationships in English are not confined to class stratification, that male domination is reflected in the history of English vocabulary, in the ways in which women are talked about. There is a rich vocabulary of affective words denigrating women, who do not conform to the male ideal. A few examples may be mentioned. Hussy is a reduction of ME huswif (housewife), it means now 'a woman of low morals' or 'a bold saucy girl'; doll is not only a toy but is also used about a kept mistress or about a pretty and silly woman; wench
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formerly referred to a female child, later a girl of the rustic or working class and then acquired derogatory connotations. Within the diachronic approach the phenomenon of euphemism (Gr euphemismos ; It; eu ' good' and pHEME ' voice') has been repeatedly classed by many linguists as tab??, i.

. a prohibition meant as a safeguard against supernatural forces. This standpoint is hardly acceptable for modern European languages. St.

Ullmann returns to the conception of taboo several times illustrating it with propitiatory names given in the early periods of language development to such objects of superstitious fear as the bear and the weasel. He proves his point by observing the same phenomenon, i. e. the circumlocution used to name these animals, in other languages.

This is of historical interest, but no similar opposition between a direct and a propitiatory name for an animal, no matter how dangerous, can be found in present-day English. With peoples of developed culture and civilisation euphemism is intrinsically different, it is dictated by social usage, etiquette, advertising, tact, diplomatic considerations and political propaganda. From the semasiological point of view euphemism is important, because meanings with unpleasant connotations appear in words formerly neutral as a result of their repeated use instead of words that are for some reason unmentionable, cf. deceased ' dead', deranged ' mad'.

Much useful material on the political and cultural causes of coining euphemisms is given in " The Second Barnhart Dictionary of New English". We read there that in modern times euphemisms became important devices in political and military propaganda. Aggressive attacks by armadas of <https://assignbuster.com/external-and-internal-factors-of-semantic-change-essay/>

bombers which most speakers of English would call air raids are officially called protective reaction, although there is nothing protective or defensive about it. The CIA agents in the United States often use the word destabilise for all sorts of despicable or malicious acts and subversions designed to cause to topple an established foreign government or to falsify an electoral campaign.

Shameful secrets of various underhand CIA operations, assassinations, interception of mail, that might, if revealed, embarrass the government, are called family jewels. It is decidedly less emotional to call countries with a low standard of living underdeveloped, but it seemed more tactful to call them developing. The latest terms (in the 70s) are L. D. C. — less developed countries and M.

D. C. — more developed countries, or Third World countries or emerging countries if they are newly independent. Other euphemisms are dictated by a wish to give more dignity to a profession. Some barbers called themselves hair stylists and even hairologists, airline stewards and stewardesses become flight attendants, maids become house workers, foremen become supervisors, etc. Euphemisms may be dictated by publicity needs, hence ready-tailored and ready-to-wear clothes instead of ready-made.

The influence of mass-advertising on language is growing, it is felt in every level of the language. Innovations possible in advertising are of many different types as G. N. Leech has shown, from whose book on advertising English the following example is taken. A kind of orange juice, for instance,

is called Tango. The justification of the name is given in the advertising text as follows: “ Get this different tasting Sparkling Tango.

Tell you why: made from whole oranges. Taste those oranges. Taste the tang in Tango. Tingling tang, bubbles — sparks. You drink it straight. Goes down great.

Taste the tang in Tango. New Sparkling Tango”. The reader will see for himself how many expressive connotations and rhythmic associations are introduced by the salesman in this commercial name in an effort to attract the buyer’s attention. If we now turn to the history of the language, we see economic causes are obviously at work in the semantic development of the word wealth.

It first meant ‘ well-being’, ‘ happiness’ from weal from OE wela whence well. This original meaning is preserved in the compounds commonwealth and commonweal. The present meaning became possible due to the role played by money both in feudal and bourgeois society. The chief wealth of the early inhabitants of Europe being the cattle, OE feoh means both ‘ cattle’ and ‘ money’, likewise Goth faihu; Lat pecus meant ‘ cattle’ and pecunia meant ‘ money’. ME fee-house is both a cattle-shed and a treasury. The present-day English fee most frequently means the price paid for services to a lawyer or a physician.

It appears to develop jointly from the above mentioned OE feoh and the Anglo-French fee, fie, probably of the same origin, meaning ‘ a recompense’ and ‘ a feudal tenure’. This modern meaning is obvious in the following

example: Physicians of the utmost fame were called at once, but when they
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came they answered as they took their fees, " There is no cure for this disease. " (Belloc) The constant development of industry, agriculture, trade and transport bring into being new objects and new notions. Words to name them are either borrowed or created from material already existing in the language and it often happens that new meanings are thus acquired by old words. /5, 71/ | III.

Analysis of the factors of semantic change
A language appears, it grows, like a child, develops, like an adult, changes during its life, due to many internal and external factors, and, finally, it dies, giving birth to other languages. In what follows the second stage of a language life - its growth and development will be researched. What is a semantic change? What is a change itself? In this research we shall try to give an answer to this question. One of the most important phenomena that occur during a language life is semantic change and semantic development.

Due to meaning changes a language develops, enriches becomes perfect. The study of semantic change involves studying etymology of a language. From Greek etumologia, from etumon true meaning of a word, and -logia, study. Both the study of the history of words and a statement of the origin and history of a word, including changes in its form and meaning.

The sense in which the 17c poet Milton used it " Etymology, or right wording, teacheth what belongs to every single word or part of speech" is obsolete. Speaking about etymology, we can't help mentioning history of a language. Historical changes in meaning are unpatterned, because derivations are usually idiomatic; the meaning of the whole is not simply the sum of the

meanings of the parts. The adjective *sedate* goes back to the Latin verb *sedare* (to settle: a person, a dispute, a war), which comes from the IE root *sed-* (sit); hence the basic meaning “(having been) settled”. The derived adjective *sedative* is then something that tends to settle someone.

However, in Modern English, the adjective *sedate* means “deliberately composed and dignified by one’s own character or efforts”, not (as *sedative* would suggest) “stupefied by the effects of a drug”. The Modern English verb *sedate* is a back-formation from *sedative* and therefore draws on the meaning of *sedative* and not on the meaning of the earlier adjective *sedate*. The homonymic adjective and verb *sedate* share a common origin in IE *sed-*, but have developed such divergent meanings that the ancient adjective cannot suitably describe someone who shows the effects of the recent verb. As the 19c German philologist Max Muller wrote: “The etymology of a word can never give us its definition” (1880). Even supposedly objective terms like numerals undergo change with the passage of time. Thus, although *only* was originally “one-ly”, it is now an adverb suitable for any quality or quantity, as in the etymological paradox “only twelve”.

Combination is now the mixture of any number of elements, but once it was only of two elements, its base being the Latin *bin-* as in *binary*. Testimony is from IE *tristi*, the “third (person) standing by”, but is now evidence given by any person. *Quintessence* was once the fifth and highest essential element (in addition to earth, air, fire, and water), but is now simply the pure example of any thing or person. *September* was once the seventh month (Latin *septem* - seven), but is now the ninth; the other months from *October* to *December* follow the same pattern. *Dean*, now the head of a group,
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especially academic, of any number, was once specifically a group of ten (Greek deka - ten, as in decathlon); decimate once meant "to reduce by a tenth" (compare decimal), but now means to reduce by any substantial amount. Quarantine is now a sequestration of any length, but was once of forty days (French quarante).

"Contrary to what is generally believed, meaning and sense were never the same thing, meaning shows itself at once, direct, literal, explicit, enclosed in itself, univocal, if you like, whilst sense cannot stay still, it seethes with second, third, and fourth senses, radiating out in different directions that divide and subdivide into branches and branchlets, until they disappear from view, the sense of every word is like a star hurling spring tides out into space, cosmic winds, agnetic perturbations, afflictions"(Arnold). The phenomenon of semantic change was studied not only by linguists, but also by psychologists. Psychologists have noticed that children are very creative in inventing new words and in inventing new meanings of the old words. That phenomenon was studied by such psychologists as Clark, Nelson, Boerman, etc. Clark's main contribution to the study of semantic development was that she put forward some general predictions about which meanings should be acquired sooner or later by the child and why. As Clark writes "when the child first begins to use identifiable words, he does not know their full (adult) meaning: he has only partial entries for them in the lexicon.

The acquisition of semantic knowledge, then, will consist of adding to the lexical entry of the word until the child's entry for that word corresponds to the adults. "Not only words have meaning properties (ambiguity), they also bear various meaning relations to one another. Just as a word can be related

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morphologically (by word formation roots) they can also be related semantically, and words by virtue of meaning form subgroups within the lexicon of a language. For example, one central meaning relation is synonymy. Thus, as we say “ automobile”, we mean a car, “ plane” (in one of its senses means “ aircraft”, “ kid” is synonymous with “ child”.

Synonymy is a relation that structures the lexicon of a language into sets of words sharing a meaning. Words can also be homogeneous, that is they may give identical pronunciation, but be different words. An often-cited example of homophony is the word “ bank” referred to a side of a river. The word “ bank” referring to a financial institution is its homophone. Homophonous words often have distinct spelling in the written language, such as Mary, marry and merry the word “ jerk” may be a homonym and a homophone at the same time.

“ To jerk” means “ to move abruptly, sharply”. A “ jerk” means “ a scum”, a “ bad person”. The word “ jerkily” means: 1) abruptly, sharply; 2) in a coward way. /3/ Of course some questions may immediately arise: Is there a single word “ bank” with two different meanings? It is by no means easy to such issues.

No firm solution could be provided here. However, many linguists distinguish between homophony and homonymy, and it is widely accepted that these two are completely different notions. There is a good example of the homophones’ producing certain difficulties is communication: A street incident In a street of an English town a policeman stops a car. In the car there is a visitor from the Continent. Policeman: Why are you driving on the

right side of the road? Visitor: Do you want me to drive on the wrong side?

Policeman: You are driving on the wrong side.

Visitor: But you said I was driving on the right side. Policeman: I meant to say that you were on the right side, and that was wrong. Visitor: A strange country. If right is wrong, I'm right when I am on the wrong side.

So why did you stop me? Policeman: My dear sir, you must keep to the left. The right side is left. Visitor: Well, I want to go to Bellwood. Will you tell me the way, please? Policeman: Certainly.

At the end of the road turn left. Visitor: Now let me think. Turn left. In England left is right and right is wrong.

Is that the idea? Policeman: You will be right if you turn left. But if you turn right you'll be wrong. Visitor: Thank you for the explanation. It's quite clear, and I will do my best not to forget it. /12, 97/ All types of semantic change depend on some comparison of the earlier (whether extinct or still in use) and the new meaning of the given word.

This comparison may be based on difference between the conceptual expression, or referents in the real world that are pointed out, on the type of psychological association at work, on evaluation of the later by the speaker, on lexico-grammatical categories, or possibly on some other features. M. Breal and H. Paul offered us a diachronic classification of semantic change. Breal was probably the first scientist who emphasized the fact that in general usage into some special sphere of communication, a word as a rule undergoes some sort of specialization of meaning.

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When the meaning is narrowed, the word can name fewer objects, at the same time the content of a word is being enriched, as it includes a greater number of relevant features, by which it is characterized. This phenomenon is frequently called “ narrowing of meaning”. Let’s present some examples. The word play suggests different notions to a child, a playwright, a football player, a musician, or to a chess-player, and it has in their speeches different semantic paradigms. H. Paul affirms that this type of semantic change is used more frequently in the vocabulary of professional and trade groups.

The same is applied to the noun cell, as used by biologists, electricians and representatives of the law. The word gas may be understood differently by a soldier, a chemist, a physician, or a housewife. We can see the following examples: OE *mete* – food changed into meat in the Md E and has acquired a new, more precise one, that of “ edible flesh”; OE *fujol* – bird transformed due to the historical evolution of the language into fowl – “ domestic bird” in Md E; OE *deor* became deer in Md E and acquired the meaning of a “ wild ruminant of a special species”, whereas in OE it had the meaning of a beast, which can be proved by the example, or a quotation “... rats and mice, and other deer”, found in works of the Shakespearean period. The last example proves that it still had the old meaning in ME; *hund* – “ any kind of dog” from ME changed its meaning in Md E, and presently has the meaning of a “ hunting dog of a special breed.

” The process opposite to specialization is called generalization, or widening of meaning. In this case the meaning of a new notion is wider than the old one, whereas the content is poorer. In most cases generalization is combined with a higher order of abstraction than in the notion expressed by the <https://assignbuster.com/external-and-internal-factors-of-semantic-change-essay/>

previous meaning. The Oxford Companion to the English Language gives us the following definition of generalization: " A process of semantic change that widens the meaning of a word, phrase, or lexeme". In Middle English, pigeon meant a " young bird", especially a " young dove", but from the late 15c has come to refer especially to the whole family Columbidae.

Dove is now generally used for a smaller variety of pigeon. Such shifts in meaning are usually slow and tendential rather than rapid and absolute. Early usages continue indefinitely alongside later changes that have become dominant, as was true of pigeon and dove in the 16c. In the process of change, terms may acquire further meanings within a set of words. /7, 91/ In other words, it is a translation from a concrete meaning to an abstract one, which is very frequently encountered in the course of a language development. In this case an evident semantic change occurs.

Widening of meaning is one of the most important phenomena studied by linguists. Transfers of meaning have always interested linguists from all over the world. This is a very complex process, which involves many scientists and a lot of careful researches. However, the causes of semantic change haven't been studied sorrowfully yet. Still, some investigations have been done. Discussing the process of semantic change we concentrate upon factors and attempt to find out why the word undergoes change of meaning, how they occur, and what actually was changed. In other words we compare and describe the difference between them mainly in terms of changes of denotational and connotational meanings. The factors accounting for the semantic change may be roughly divided into two parts: internal and

external factors of semantic change. Internal factors are factors acting within
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a linguistic system. The commonest form, which this influence takes, is so-called ellipsis. In a phrase made up of two words, one of them is omitted, and its meaning is transferred to its partner. Thus, due to ellipsis, sale is used for cut-price sale, to open on is used in army instead of to open fire on, as in: "Today at three a. m. NATO has opened on Cosovo's Microwire Plant. There is no information about casualties". Another internal factor of semantic change is differentiation of synonyms, which can be illustrated by the development of a number of words. Thus, land (O E land-" both solid part of earth's surface", and " a territory of a nation"). In the course of the historical development of the language, this word had acquired only the first meaning, that of " solid part of earth's surface", the second one having been lost. Another example is country (O Fr countree). Being borrowed from French, with the meaning of " a territory of a nation", this word had acquired a new meaning, that of " a village". The word rapidly has developed into immediately, similarly, the verbs to catch, to grasp, had acquired the meaning of " to understand". An interesting case is the word tide, which used to be a synonym for time in old English. Later tide took on it a more limited application to the shifting waters, and time became a general word. By external factors of semantic change we understand " various changes in the life of the speech community, changes in economical and social structure, changes of ideas, scientific concepts, ways of life, and other spheres of human activities as reflected in word meaning". In other words, external factors of semantic change are those, which do not deal with linguistics, they are connected with development of the human mind and are influenced by science, politics, technical development, etc. Generally speaking, in the majority of cases the word remains the same, if considering <https://assignbuster.com/external-and-internal-factors-of-semantic-change-essay/>

form phonetic point of view, but the word's meaning changes, sometimes even the word structure the word's structure may change. Thee referent becomes modified in the course of development of speech community, whereas the sound form usually remains unaltered. The word car goes back to the Latin carrus, which used to denote " a four-wheeled wagon". In Md E it already meant " a vehicle", in M E the word car is a general word for any vehicle, without specifying the type; the word atom originally was considered unadvisable. This word came into English from French (autome), having the meaning of " a body too small to be divided". We can also speak about functional change as external factor of semantic change, as in the up-mentioned examples of the words diesel, ampere, ohm, volt, etc. Due to the technical evolution of the society, these words started to denote not only proper names, but also some physical or chemical terms. Pejoration is another type of external factor of semantic change. There are cases of semantic disparagement of women. Thus, there are many words in English that have an affective nature, purposed to insult women. The word hussy (M E houswif) originally meant " a housewife", now it denotes a " woman of low morals"; the word wench originally denoted " a female child", later it acquired the meaning of " rustic or working class woman", and now it has a derogatory connotation. While investigating the process of semantic change, it becomes evident that almost every word in English may undergo a meanin shift. In most cases the new meaning is based upon the context. Still, very often words with new meanings appear in dictionaries. In such cases the stylistic devices are called dead. Some words may undergo specialization of meaning, i. e. he meaning of a word may narrow in the course of the historical evolution of the language. It has to be pointed out that in the <https://assignbuster.com/external-and-internal-factors-of-semantic-change-essay/>

majority of cases meaning shift occurs because of various stylistic devices, which give the context a transferred meaning. They are: metaphor and metonymy (based on association of similarity of contiguity), antonomasia, (based on the interplay of logical and nominal meanings of a word) hyperbole (which is an intended exaggeration of the word's meaning), litotes (understatement), irony (based in simultaneity of the dictionary and contextual meaning), euphemism (paraphrasing something unpleasant), etc. Many of these stylistic devices change a word's meaning only in one specific context. However, very often, these words start to be frequently used in a language and become established in speech. It can be noticed that the transfer of meaning is also based on connotational change. Words' meanings get a more elevated connotation (amelioration), or a less pleasant one (pejoration). I have come to the conclusion that the meaning shift is an interdisciplinary. Semantic change is very closely related to etymology. To observe the shift of meaning it is crucial to know it's original meaning. I would affirm that etymology, as a branch of sociolinguistics together with semantics, form the base of the study of the meaning change. Phonology also studies the process of semantic change, but it deals more with the change at the word level, not at the level of a sentence and as a language as a whole. Conclusion Semantic change in the context of words describes the gradual shift in the conventional meaning of words, as people use them in new types of contexts and these usages become normal. Often in the course of semantic change, a word shifts its meaning to the point that the modern meaning is radically different from the original usage. While writing this course paper we have dialled in detail with various types of semantic change. This is necessary not only because of the interest the various cases

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present in themselves but also because a thorough knowledge of these possibilities helps one to understand the semantic structure of English words at the present stage of their development. The development and change of the semantic structure of a word is always a source of qualitative and quantitative development of the vocabulary. We defined concept of “ internal” and “ external” factors of semantic change. We identified that: 1) Internal factors influencing the process of vocabulary adaptation may be of paradigmatic and syntagmatic character; in dealing with them we have to do with the constant interaction and interdependence of vocabulary units in language and speech, such as differentiation between synonyms, changes taking place in connection with ellipsis and with fixed contexts, changes resulting from ambiguity in certain contexts, and some other causes. Differentiation of synonyms is a gradual change observed in the course of language history, sometimes, but not necessarily, involving the semantic assimilation of loan words.) The external (extralinguistic) factors are determined by the social nature of the language: they are observed in changes of meaning resulting from the development of the notion expressed and the thing named and by the appearance of new notions and things. In other words, external causes of semantic change are connected with the development of the human mind as it moulds reality to conform with its needs. The external factors are determined by the social nature of the language: they are observed in changes of meaning resulting from the development of the notion expressed and the thing named and by the appearance of new notions and things. In other words, external causes of semantic change are connected with the development of the human mind as it moulds reality to conform with its needs. Bibliography 1. Antrushina. “ <https://assignbuster.com/external-and-internal-factors-of-semantic-change-essay/>

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