DEGREE OF SYNONYMITY OF A NUMBER OF PAIRS OF SYNONYMOUS LEXICAL ITEMS IN INDONESIAN LANGUAGE

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1. Introduction

Many linguists have tried to define what synonymy is. Among the definitions given, the one given by Lyons (1981:50) seems to be the most flexible. He stated that the expressions with the same meaning are synonymous. This definition can cover the possibility that lexically simple expressions may have the same meaning as lexically complex expressions.

As far as a group of lexical items bear a special sort of semantic resemblance, they are stated to be synonymous. Synonyms must only not manifest a high degree of semantic overlap, they must also have a low degree of implicit contrast (Cruse, 1990:266), meaning that rare absolute synonymy seems to be true. It is very seldom for us to find two synonymous expressions satisfying all the following conditions (Lyon, 1981:50) in order to be totally synonymous:

(1) Synonyms are totally synonymous if, and only if, all their meanings are identical – in the same range of meaning.
(2) Synonyms are totally synonymous if, and only if, they are synonymous in all contexts – being collocational.
(3) Synonyms are completely synonymous if, and only if, they are identical in all (relevant) dimensions of meaning (field, mode and style).

The pairs of synonymous expressions that cannot satisfy such conditions are referred to as being partially synonymous or incomplete synonymous. As an illustration, most people agree that “big” and “large” are synonymous in the following sentence:

(1) The apartment being built is big/large.

However, we cannot decide yet whether they are totally or partially synonymous until we consider the following pairs of sentences:

(2) My father has a big problem.
(3) *My father has a large problem.

Now it is clear that “big” and “large” are not totally synonymous. From collocation point of view, they cannot replace one another. They do not have the same collocation range.
There must be some subtle difference of lexical meaning between them. Therefore, synonyms can also be stated to be lexical items whose senses are identical in respect of “central” semantic traits, but are different only in respect of what is described as “minor” or “peripheral” semantic traits.

A synonym is often employed as an explanation, or clarification of the meaning of another word or lexical item (Cruse, 1990:267). This is exemplified by the following sentences:

(4) We are in the same boat, *that is to say*, we have the same problem.
(5) Your English is better, *or* improved.

We recognize that languages are dynamic. They change as a result of the process of modernization and the contact made by their speakers. When they have new concepts but they do not have any lexical items in their languages to bear the senses of such concepts, the process of borrowing from another language takes place. Or they already have the lexical items needed to bear the senses of such concepts, but they prefer to use those derived from another language, which can be a foreign language or a regional language (vernacular) whether genetically related or not. This can be exemplified by the fact that in Indonesian language, there is already the word “hasil” (product) but the word “produksi” is preferred which is derived from an English word “product”. There are many examples of this type of borrowing both from foreign languages and from the vernaculars existing in Indonesia, which certainly enrich the Indonesian vocabulary. Or it is also possible that the lexical items that already exist in their language cannot bear exactly the senses which are supposed to bear, which finally also lead to the process of borrowing and; as a result, synonymy cannot be avoided.

2. Discussion

This paper is mainly concerned with the degree of synonymy of a number of synonymous lexical items in Indonesian language found in the magazine *Intisari*, which was published in January 1990 (page 31) by PT Gramedia Jakarta. Not all the synonymous lexical items listed in it are discussed. The synonymous lexical items which are discussed in this article are as follows.
1. *contoh* = *teladan* (example)
2. *menjelang* = *menyongsong* (welcome)
3. *kawin* = *nikah* (married)
4. *korban* = *kurban* (sacrifice)
5. *melayat* = *melawat* (make a visit condolence)

As there is no established way of characterizing synonyms (Cruse, 1990: 266), the problem of the study is viewed from:

(i) necessary resemblances and permissible differences only and;
(ii) context

The pairs of synonymous lexical items are discussed one pair by one pair. Examples are provided for each pair so that the degree of synonymy can be identified and explanation can be provided.

2.1 *contoh* = *teladan* (example)

(1) Beras yang diterimadaksamadengan*contohnya*.
*Beras yang tidaksamadenganteladannya*.
(The rice accepted is not the same as the example given)

(2) Guru memberi *contoh* bagaimana lemparkan bola.
*Guru memberiteladan bagaimana lemparkan bola*.
(The teacher gives an example how to throw the ball)

(3) Kerajinankakakmudalamabelajarharus kaukanjadjikan*contoh*.
Kerajinankakakmudaloambelajarharuskauja di*tauladan*.
(Your brother’s diligence in studying must be a good example for you to follow.

The above examples show that “*contoh*” and “*teladan*” are not totally synonymous. “Contoh” refers to (1) a thing which can be used to represent a group of things of similar shape, type and condition; (2) a manner by which an activity would be best done and (3) recommended behavior that should be followed, where it can be replaced by “*teladan*”. It can be stated that the degree of synonymy between “*contoh*” and “*teladan*” is low.
2.2 *menjelang* = *menyongsong* (welcome)

Among the synonymous pairs discussed in this study, this might be the most unique, as can be seen from the following examples. They can replace one another but they are not necessarily synonymous.

(4) *menjelang* Tahun Baru (welcome New Year)
(5) *menyongsong* Tahun Baru (welcome New Year)

Both “menjelang” and “menyongsong” are metaphorically used in example 4 and 5 seem to be exchangeable. The same phenomenon can also be observed from example 6 and 7.

(6) *menjelang* seseorang (welcome someone)
(7) *menyongsong* seseorang (welcome someone)

The difference in meaning between “menjelang” and “menyongsong”, although they look exchangeable and, therefore, totally synonymous, can be better explained by example 6 and 7. Example 6 implies that someone (a), the welcoming, goes to welcome someone (B), the welcome. B does not move – he/she is where he/she is. If he/she is in his/her house, A (the welcoming) goes there to welcome him/her. Example 7 implies that B (the welcome) is on his/her way to where the welcoming is. This means that A meets B on his/her way to where A is. Now look at example 4 and 5 again; both “menjelang” and “menyongsong” can be used. They are grammatically correct and semantically make sense. However, although they can replace one another, as stated above, they are not necessarily synonymous. The argument as follows: in example 4 the New Year, which is welcome is supposed to stay still where it is. As time goes by, we are getting closer and closer to it. In example 5, the direction is supposed to reverse – we are supposed to be where we are and the New Year is supposed to be getting closer to us as time goes by. Which one is used depends on which is supposed to move and which is supposed to stay still – the welcome or the welcoming. Now it is clear that they can replace one another; however, they are different in meaning.

2.3 *kawin* = *nikah* (married)
It can be proved that “kawin” and “nikah” are synonymous but the information provided that “kawin” has the sub-component of meaning of being illegal and “nikah” has the sub-component of meaning of being legal in it is a big question which needs to be answered with explanation. If the information provided in the data is right, the sentence:

(8) Sayadanistrisayasudahkawinselamalimatahun.
   (My wife and I are already married for five years)
implies that:
We only have lived together for five years without being legally married.

(9) Sayadanistrisayasudahnikahselamalimatahun.
   (My wife and I are already married for five years)
implies that:
The law acknowledges that we are married.
So the difference is only being legal and illegal as far as the information given in the data source is concerned.

If “kawin” means “illegally united in marriage” and “nikah” means “legally united in marriages”, the big question is that why the government of Indonesia has adopted the term “Undang-undangPerkawinan” as the law to which marriage-related issues refer? Why it does not adopt “Undang-undangPernikahan” for the law of the marriage.

The government civil servants in Indonesia are often obliged to fill in a special form from which the government can obtain their personal data. Again, if “kawin” means being illegally united in marriage and “nikah” means being legally united in marriage, why the phrase or term included in the form is intended to elicit information if they are married or not reads “kawin/tidak” instead of “nikah/tidak” (married/single)?

The difference is only that “nikah” has something to do with human being and “kawin” has something to do with animals or unanimate beings. This is exemplified by the following sentences:
(10) Untuk keturunan yang baik, make lembu Belanda tudi kawin and dengan lembu dalam negeri.
   *Untuk memperoleh keturunan yang baik, makalembu Belandaitu y dinikah and dengan lembu dalam negeri.
   (In order to have good offsprings, the Dutch cows are married to the indigenous ones).

(11) Karenagaram sedang langka, maka penjual garam selalu dikawin dengan barang lain.
   *Karenagaram sedang langka, maka penjual garam selalu dinikahkan dengan barang lain.

(12) Apakah kak perempuan musudah nikah?
   Apakah kak perempuan musudah kawin?

In sentences 10 and 11 “kawin” and “nikah” cannot replace one another. However, in sentence 12 they can, although they could not have been. This could be the result of the speaker’s familiarity with the terms “Hukum Perkawinan” and “kawin/tidak” mentioned above. As far as these two terms still exist, it is belied that “nikah” and “kawin” it is still considered replaceable and therefore they are synonymous.

2.4 korban = kurban (sacrifice)

In the data source it is stated that “korban” and “kurban” are synonymous and that they are derived from Arabic. No explanation is provided.

It is true that they are synonymous but the fields where they are used are different. It is possible that in Arabic countries, the word “kurban”, from which “korban” is derived, is used in whatever fields they may be. But in Indonesian language, the meaning has slightly changed. The meaning has been extended. “Kurban” is used to refer to whatever sacrifice is made for God or Gods), as exemplified by the following sentences:

13) Padahari Idulhada tuninini Paman berkurban seekorsapi.
   (On Idulhada celebration this year Uncle sacrificed one cow.

Whereas “korban” is used to refer to (Wojowasito, 1977: 101):

(a) Whatever sacrifice voluntarily made for the State, parents or someone else

(14) Mereka telageh mengorbankan jiwa raga mereka untuk Nusa dan Bangsa.
   (They have died for the State)
(b) Financial loss or victims in traffic accidents, fires, natural disasters and negative acts.

(15) Banjiritumemintakorban 10 orang.
(The flood cost 10 lives)

(16) Ayahnyaadalahsatudari korban pembunuhanitu.
(His father was one of the victims of the assassination)

It is clear from the examples that the meaning of “kurban” has been extended in Indonesian language from its original meaning. They are identical but cannot replace one another.

* PadahariIdulhadatahuniniPamanberkorbanseekorsapi.

*Merekatelah mengurbankan jiwa merekauntuknusadanbangsa.

*Banjiritumemintakurban 10 orang.

*Ayahnyaadalahsalahsatu korban pembunuhanitu.

2.5 melayat = melawat (make a visit condolence)

As far as their basic meanings are concerned (make a visit condolence), “melayat” and “melawat” are identical and can replace one another. Most native speakers of Indonesian language seem to agree that they are synonymous words as can be shown by the following examples:

(17) Pertanyaan :Bapakandakemana?
   Jawab : Diapergimelayat

   Question : Where is your father?
   Answer : He is making a visit condelence

However, in sentence 18 they cannot replace one another.

(18) BapakPresidenakan melawat kebeberapanegaraEropa.
   *BapakPresidenakan melayat kebeberapanegaraEropa.
   (President will make a trip to several European countries).

It can be seen that in its secondary meaning, “melawat” cannot be replaced by “melayat”. The degree of their synonymy is low – limited to their primary or basic meaning.
3. Conclusion

From the five pairs of synonymous expressions in Indonesian language are concerned, it has been proved that totally synonymous lexical items are extremely rare and this finding supports what is stated by Lyon (1981: 50) and Cruse (1990:266). It can also be concluded that the degree of synonymy of the five pairs of expressions described above are low. In one context they are synonymous but in the other context they do not.

References