




Semantic Relations in a Group of Size Adjectives in Modern French Language

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to determine the internal structure of the analyzed lexical and semantic group, to identify semantic relations between size adjectives in their direct meanings, as well as external relations of these units with members of other lexical groups. Size adjectives actualize the concept of “extension (of a material object) in space”, these adjectives are graded, they are united in a lexical and semantic group (LSG), which has a very clear internal structure, i.e. they are connected in their various meanings by synonymous, hyper-hyponymic and antonymic relations.

The periphery of the analyzed LSG is a transition zone between size adjectives and adjectives of modal-quantitative characteristics, adjectives of form, temporal adjectives, with adjectives of intellectual and moral evaluation. Size adjectives, in their various direct nominative meanings, are included in 15 synonymous series (42 sememes). The choice of an adjective as a determinant is determined either by the norm of the language or by the speaker’s attitude. Within the analyzed LSG, 12 antonymic groups are distinguished, which include 53 sememes. Antonymic juxtapositions in the field of direct nominative values of size adjectives belong to the type of contrast, as they are based on a quantitative marker. Spatial features do not participate in the formation of antonymic juxtapositions of size adjectives. Objects are contrasted: a) belonging to the same class: to classes of similar objects: names of parts of the same whole. For the first time, LSG of size adjectives is analyzed in a more complete composition, compared to previously conducted studies. For the first time, size adjectives are subjected to “cross-analysis” at the level of paradigmatics and syntagmatics simultaneously.

The study was conducted on the material of the modern French language based on a large factual material: about 10,000 word usage from texts of modern French authors, data from explanatory dictionaries and a survey of informants, native speakers. Research methods are determined by the specifics of the material and include the method of continuous sampling, for selecting size adjectives from the works of French authors of the XX century and periodicals, as well as the method of component analysis, for studying the semantics of selected adjectives.

Keywords: Size adjectives, lexical and semantic group, paradigmatic and syntagmatic links, direct nominative meanings, French language

Introduction

The problem of semantic relations between language lexical units continues to be one of the most complex problems of modern lexicology. The difficulty of solving it, the formation of laws that operate in the lexical system, is determined by the complexity of the main object of research – the word, the semantic meaning of which is revealed both in paradigmatics and in specific lexical connections in speech. The specificity of the semantic significance of the word gives a diffuse character to the semantic structure of the language and makes it difficult to identify common semantic features that can serve as the basis for systematization of lexical units.

The internal arrangement of the semantic side of the language is revealed with greater clarity when considering the relations between individual lexemes within the framework of particular semantic subsystems - groups of words united by some common semantic feature. The relative clarity of the boundaries of these groups and the numerical limitations constituent units allows a deeper insight into the complex semantic relations between words, and thus to identify patterns of semantic relation in language: semantic group as an integral part of the general lexical system of language reflects its system of laws.

From this point of view, the appeal to the study of semantic relations in the lexical and semantic group of size adjectives in the French language is quite justified and very **relevant**. The study of semantic relations of size adjectives in modern French contributes to the development of problems of the system organization of vocabulary in general, as well as some issues of the theory of nomination, in particular, the epistemological aspect of language learning through the prism of analyzing the reflection of information about the physical dimensions of objects in the material world in language. The study is of particular importance also because the integral feature studied on the material of size adjectives - the graded property feature - covers an extensive lexical and semantic zone, where it is implemented in combination with various qualitative features, which makes it possible to raise the question of system connections in the vocabulary more widely, without being limited to one lexical and semantic group.

The aim of this article is to determine the internal structure of the analyzed lexical and semantic group, to identify semantic relations between size adjectives in their direct meanings, as well as external relations of these units with members of other lexical groups.

The object of the research is size adjectives in French in their direct meanings.

The relevance of the research is determined by the need to describe the semantics of size adjectives as lexical units that actualize one of the fundamental concepts in the language – the concept of “measurement, the extent of an object in space”, which is, as it is known, the basis of all measurement in general, as well as the importance of studying system connections and asystemic trends in vocabulary based on polysemic highly used units, such as size adjectives. The task of improving the methodology of clear and reasonable differentiation of individual meanings of lexical units has not lost its relevance; 3) the analysis of the semantics analyzed by LSG is also relevant in the future of improving the teaching and learning of French as a foreign language, as dictionary definitions given by explanatory dictionaries of the modern French language do not give a complete picture of the specifics of the content and related features of the use of size adjectives. The lexical design of the analyzed semantic domain has significant differences a) in terms of autonomous design of some concepts, cf.: the presence of both members of the juxtaposition “glubokiy”/ “melkiy” in Russian and the absence of the counter-term “profound” in French; b) in terms of expressing similar concepts by lexical differentiation in French, cf.: mince, fin, ténu, délié; immense, énorme, géant, and morphological in Russian, cf.: tonkiy, tonen'kiy, tonyusen'kiy, ogromny, gromadny; c) in terms of more or less detail of individual sections of the analyzed area, which complicates the comparison of related units of the two languages in terms of content, cf. domain of “planar” dimensions: spacieux, vaste, étendu, as well as suitable meanings for grand, gros, large and “spacious”; ample, large and “wide (about clothes)”, etc. These discrepancies complicate the perception of information and the adequate design of statements in a foreign language.

Thus, the study of the semantics of size adjectives provides material for 1) studying some problems of nomination in the French language: the “world – language” relation or ways of expressing the concept of “size” in a particular language; 2) for understanding some principles of functioning of lexical units, in particular, size adjectives and names of material objects – in terms of the permissibility of certain combinations, the rules for choosing one of the semantically similar units in each case.

The scientific novelty of the presented work is determined by the fact that for the first time the study of size adjectives on the material of romance languages, in particular the French language, is accepted taking into account onomasiological and semasiological approaches simultaneously. As a result, for the first time, LSG of size adjectives is analyzed in a more complete composition, compared to previously conducted studies. For the first time, size adjectives are subjected to “cross-analysis” at the level of paradigmatics and syntagmatics simultaneously.

Previously size adjectives in romance languages have already attracted the attention of researchers who have turned in particular to the analysis of semantic evolution of lexical pairs grand – petit, long – court, haut – bas and large – étroit [1], for description of the semantics of adjectives of type grande – pequeño, immenso – menudo [2], by comparative analysis of two adjectives meaning “long” – “short”, particularly in French and Portuguese [3].

In modern linguistics, the undying interest of linguists in the cognitive study of language can also be seen [4-15].

The extremely extensive scope of the study – the simultaneous analysis of direct and figurative meanings of adjectives in different periods of language development, based on the material of four different languages, proved to be a serious obstacle to a comprehensive analysis of ways to actualize the actual spatial aspect of the content of these adjectives, to identify the principles of system arrangement within the corresponding LSG and some other lexical groups.

Methods and Research Materials

The study was conducted on **the material** of the modern French language based on a large factual material: about 10,000 word usage from texts of modern French authors, data from explanatory dictionaries and a survey of informants, native speakers. **Research methods** are determined by the specifics of the material and include the method of continuous sampling, for selecting size adjectives from the works of French authors of the XX century and periodicals, as well as the method of component analysis, for studying the semantics of selected adjectives.

Results and Discussion

Lexical and semantic analysis of adjectives with a size component in French

It is known that the main difficulties in studying the system of vocabulary are associated with the identification of clear boundaries of microsystems in the mass of the dictionary and with the identification of universal semantic features, i.e. connecting elements. The analysis of the semantic areas of vocabulary, allocated on the basis of some narrowly-specific semantic characteristics provide a key to understanding systemic arrangement of vocabulary in general, limits the interest of the research group, cf.: "name of homes", "kinship terms", etc.

Size adjectives, on the contrary, actualize the concept of "extension (of a material object) in space", which refers to the fundamental concepts of language. These adjectives are graded, i.e. they have a significant quantitative characteristic of objects relative to the degree of manifestation of the feature. See also: adjectives of temperature perception: chaud – froid; forces: fort – faible, as well as modal-quantitative considérable, important, minime.

The analysis shows that the size marker as an integral feature of the analyzed group is a complex unity of two elements, quantitative and spatial.

Each of these features is included in the content of lexical units of a number of other semantic zones and lexical groups.

Thus, the quantitative feature is found in the content of adjectives of temperature perception, intensity (action), etc. froid – frais; faible – doux, as well as predicates of verbs: traîner, marcher, courir.

The content of the names of material objects also includes an indication of plurality¹: groupe, m; bouquet, m; on certain dimensions of the object, which is a kind of "quantitative" characteristic – "absolute size of the object", and allows comparing objects by size, through the size adjectives: une baignoire vaste à sa taille, Presqu'une piscine; une route aussi large qu'une autoroute. Cf. explicit oppositions maison, f – maisonnette, f; "dom"/ "domik".

The spatial characteristic of an object relative to its structural features is also included in the "collapsed" content of the name of a material object, the image of which in the human mind is associated either with a line, cf.: fleuve, m; tige, f, or with a plane, cf.: feuille, f; table, f; mur, m, or with volume – a) mass: pomme, f; perle, f, or b) volume: tasse, f; salle, f; voiture, f.

Thus, the features of "quantitative" and "spatial" characteristics should be recognized as universal semantic features that ensure the coherence of vocabulary in a significant part of it.

In the content of size adjectives, the "quantitative" feature acts as an indication of the relative quantity as a deviation from some average size (characteristic of the reference object of the class, cf.: un long canal и un long nez; une haute montagne – une haute chaise (de la télégraphiste).

Features of the content of size adjectives relative to the degree of deviation from the norm or equal to it are the basis for identifying microsystems within the analyzed LSG, namely: 1) "more than normal", abbreviated D>Nr¹, cf.: un long corridor; unetrancheépaisse; 2) "significantly more than normal", D>>Nr, cf.: une vaste chaudière (de centrale électrique); 3) "extremely large", D>>>Nr», cf.: une colossale masse humaine; 4) "equal to standard" show moyen and normal D~Nr; and also in the area of "small sizes" 5) D<Nr cp.: un petit arbre; une courte main; 6) D<<Nr, cp. une jeune fille menue; 7) D<<<Nr, cp.: une ongle infime; une lampe minuscule.

The content of adjectives included in these microsystems includes a sign of "spatial characteristics" of different levels of specification. So, adjectives of categories D>Nr and D<Nr form several subgroups, according to the features of the spatial feature in their content, specified in relation to the method of object characterization: linear in one dimension, cf.: long – court "long – short"; in two dimensions, planar, cf.: spacieux – "spacious" et al.; in three dimensions – volumetric, cf.: gros – "volumetric" et al. Within each of the subgroups, series of adjectives are differentiated, the content of which includes a clarification, cf.: "relative to the linear dimension horizontally/vertically": long, large/haut, and within the first row – on the basis of "linear measurement horizontally along/across": long/ large. Other size adjectives are classified in the same way.

The boundaries between these rows are not absolute: long, large, indicating a linear dimension in its main meaning – une longue branche, or large route, describe in their secondary meanings or the length of the planar, cf.: une large tâche – "big spot", or volume-plane, cf.: UN large manteau: "wide, spacious coat".

¹D – dimension (size); Nr – norme (standard or average, normal size of the reference object); signs >, >>, >>> and <, <<, <<< indicate "excess" or "insufficient" dimensions; the sign ~ indicates "equal" dimensions.

The “interpenetrability” of these categories is most obvious on the example of the adjectives *grand* and *petit*, which in their various meanings implement, respectively, indications of a linear, planar or volumetric dimension of an object and are connected by synonymous and antonymic relations with many members of the analyzed LSG, i.e. they are simultaneously included in several microgroups. Cf.: *un petit bonhomme; un petit pin; une chaise basse; un court talus* – «low»; *un palier étroit; diviser la vaste salle en / petites chambres plus intimes* “small area”.

Differentiation of individual meanings of adjectives, identification of features of their contents, in particular, clarification of the specifics of the content of synonymous units, were carried out by a comprehensive analysis of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic connections of adjectives of size. At the same time, each adjective is analyzed simultaneously as an independent nominative unit and as a member of certain paradigmatic and syntagmatic series.

As a result of our analysis, the following tasks were solved: 1) the differentiation of various direct nominative values of size adjectives was carried out more reasonably, in case of discrepancies in the data of explanatory dictionaries, 2) the specifics of the content of semantically similar units and related features of their functioning were revealed.

A comparative content analysis of size adjectives and relationships within the analyzed LSG led us to the conclusion that the design of a concept as a basic nominative values of lexical units, together with the presence of guidance in the definition of synonymy and / or antonymy of adjective corresponding unit, can serve as a basis for the allocation of certain sememe as an independent /minor/ values of another adjective. So, we consider, following the authors of the Robert dictionary, CB₅² *grand* – “large volume, capacity” as an independent one, on the grounds that the specified content is realized as the main meaning by the adjectives *gros, massif, volumineux*, and the latter are given by a number of dictionaries as synonymous with *grand*.

The status of secondary values *long, large, and grand – petit* was clarified based on an in-depth analysis of their content. So CB₂, *grand* and *petit* – “large/ small breed (about animals)”, stand out as independent, because they do not belong to the graded units; unlike other values of *grand* and *petit*, they do not have an analog within the group and occupy an isolated position – Cf.: *les petits oiseaux* – “small birds, little birds”, *un petit chien* – “little dog”.

Comparison of similar units in terms of conceptual content – synonyms and antonyms, at the level of paradigmatics and syntagmatics, revealed differences in their content. For example, the synonymous *ample* and *large* – “wide, spacious (about clothing, its parts)” differ at the level of shade values: *ample* – “gathered (about the features of the cut)”, *large* – “wide, spacious”, which is emphasized in the context, cf. *UN large manteau de voyage; le vent faisait battre et flotter derrière eux leurs amples vêtements*. This difference is neutralized in combinations such as *une jupe, une robe ample / large*. The simultaneous use of these adjectives within the same context, on the contrary, reveals the specifics of their semantics, cf. *une veste large et ample*.

As mentioned above, one of the research tasks is to determine the specifics of semantically similar lexical units that differ in terms of the volume of meaning and, accordingly, are differentiated at the level of combinability. For example, the analysis of dictionary interpretations and syntagmatic connections revealed the specifics of the content of synonymous *grand₄, large₄, gros₄ and spacieux* – “large in area”.

Grand₄ conveys in the most general form the concept of “large in area” and is characterized by the most diverse compatibility, with the highest usage.

The revealed limitations of the combinability relations *spacieux, large₄, gros₄* are due to the complexity of the structure of the content of adjectives at the level of additional features, shades of meaning. Cf.: *spacieux* – “spacious (for a person), usually about a three-dimensional enclosed space perceived from the inside”. *Une voiture, une cour spacieuse*; *large₄* indicates the length in the object plane, where the width is not opposed to the length, cf.: *une large mare*; *gros₄* – “blurry expanded (in the plane)”, cf.: *une grosse tache, un gros rond*.

The features of the compatibility of these adjectives are shown in the following table:

Table 1. Implementation of adjectives with different values depending on their compatibility with the names of objects of different categories

	Planar objects				Volumetric objects
	Parts of the face	Geometrical figure	Part of territory	Parts of the structure	Houses / buildings
<i>grand₄</i>	<i>oeil</i>	<i>rond</i>	<i>plaine</i>	<i>estrade</i>	<i>salle</i>
<i>large₄</i>	<i>prunelle</i>	<i>rond</i>	∅	∅	<i>pièce</i>
<i>gros₄</i>	<i>yeux</i>	<i>rond</i>	<i>buisson</i>	∅	∅
<i>spacieux</i>	∅	∅	<i>place</i>	∅	<i>salle</i>

²Digital indicators correspond to the place of this LSG in the system of values of the analyzed adjective.

The research tasks required clarification and addition of the traditionally accepted classification of material objects, which is based on the subject-conceptual and functional correlation of objects.

The validity of these additions, the necessity of taking into account features of spatial characteristics in the meaning of the name is determined by the fact of close interaction of these characteristics of the content of the size adjective, and the designated name within the phrase where the adjective of a value due to the presence of the corresponding semantic “support” in the content name. So, the adjective *fin* implements its main meaning – “very small volume, very small” in combination with the names of “dense, solid volumes”: *une gouttelette*, *une particule fine*, and the meaning “very thin (about the layer)” in combination with the names of containers, “hollow volumes”, in the content of which the specified – adjective reveals the sign “having walls”, cf.: *une tasse*, *une coque fine*.

The incompatibility of spatial characteristics in the meaning of the name and the size adjective that form the syntagma sometimes leads to a reinterpretation of the name. Thus, *enceinte*, f “hedge”, i.e. “vertically oriented plane”, in combination with a planar adjective gets the value: “space bounded (by a fence) horizontally”, cf.: *une vaste enceinte*.

The specificity of spatial features in the meaning of the adjective and name determines their selectivity in relation to each other. cf. adjectives, *gros* and *épais* from the category of volume: *gros*₁ – “volume more than the norm” is registered in combinations like *un gros toit* (à lamansart), and *épais*₁ – “thickness more than the norm” – in combinations like *une épaisse toiture* (de feuilles sèches). The specified selectivity of the names *toit* and *toiture* belonging to the same class – “parts of the structure”, is determined by the presence of the sign “three-dimensional, volumetric (space)” in the content of *gros* and *toit* and, respectively, the sign “thickness (plane)” in the content of *toiture* and *épais*.

Our analysis of the system of values of size adjectives and content of each of them also allowed clarifying the structure of synonymous series, determining the place of each unit within its microsystem 1^β.

The condition for the implementation of synonymous relations 2⁴ is the complete co-possession of spatial and quantitative indicators in the content of the compared adjectives.

The presence of some insignificant differences at the level of shades of 3⁵ meaning in the area of quantitative and spatial aspects of meaning is not an obstacle to the synonymy of size adjectives, provided that these differences are regularly neutralized in certain positions.

Cf. the difference between *ample* and *large* – “wide (about clothing)”, where *ample* indicates “a larger amount in relation to the norm”, associated with the adjective “gathered” and thus indicates “features of the cut”, *large* is marked with the signs “wide, spacious”: but these differences are neutralized in the position: *une jupe*, *une robe*, *une manche large / ample* are restored with the appropriate “support”. In the context: *un large manteau de voyage*; *des manches amples serrées au poignet*.

Size adjectives, in their various direct nominative meanings, are included in 15 synonymous series (42 sememes). The synonymy of these adjectives is confirmed by their regular use within the same context, cf.: *de grands pins et de hautes broussailles*; *deux grandes chambres pour les filles et une autre, bien spacieuse pour les garçons*. The choice of one or another of the synonymous adjectives as the defining one is either due to the norm of the language: *grand*₁ + *arbre*, m; *pin*, m; *haut*₁ + *herbe*, f; *végétation*, f; *broussailles*, f, pl; or by setting the speaker – introduce additional information, give their own assessment of the object. Cf.: neutral *une grande chambre* and positively evaluated *une chambre spacieuse*. Some adjectives are acquiring estimates, in combination with the class names “part of the body (person)”, cf.: *de longs pieds* – “elegant, elongated feet” and *ses grands pieds la désavantageaient* – “she has a big foot + it is not pretty”.

Antonymic relations connect size adjectives, the content of which is similar in “qualitative” terms – “in thickness”/ “in height”/ “in volume”/ “in area” and contrasted in quantitative terms as +S/-S, that is, the corresponding adjectives occupy positions equidistant from “zero” in the left and right zones of the quantity axis, cf.: *long / court*, “D>/<Nr /in length”, *immense / minuscule*, “D>>>/<<<Nr”.

³1/ The internal structure of a synonym series and the hierarchy of its members are determined based on the following points: a) the use of an adjective, b) the breadth of compatibility (when describing objects of different spatial categories), c) the diversity of compatibility relationships – at the level of specific classes of names within each spatial category.

⁴2/ We accept the definition of synonyms formulated by D.N. Shmelev, “Synonyms are lexical units whose meaning contains identical elements, while differing elements are steadily neutralized in certain positions”. (See: D.N. Shmelev. Modern Russian language. Vocabulary, Moscow: Science, 1976 - 196 p.)

⁵3/ In the course of this work, we clarify the concept of “shade” of meanings as an insignificant difference in the content of semantically similar lexical units, implemented by components of meaning that are probabilistic in nature and belong to the same level of generalization.

Within the analyzed LSG, 12 antonymic groups are distinguished, which include 53 sememes.

Antonymic oppositions in the field of direct nominative values of size adjectives belong to the "contrarian" type, as they are based on a quantitative attribute. Spatial features do not participate in the formation of antonymic oppositions of size adjectives. For example, haut – profound: "more than the norm vertically up/down", long – large: "more than the norm horizontally along-across", etc. implement indications of various characteristics of the object, but the latter are not "polarized". These adjectives do not meet the requirement of antonymy in the field of graded units of the dictionary: refer to one area of the quantity axis – "more than normal": long – large; haut – profond; or "less than normal": court – étroit. These adjectives are quite applicable to one object: la baignoire si large et si longue qu'il peut s'y étendre, while antonymous adjectives are incompatible in the same context, cf.: * Une baignoire large et étroite.

The coincidence of the spatial aspect of the content causes a significant coincidence in the compatibility of antonymous size adjectives. The observed differences in compatibility are realized at the class level of specific names and are due to the "real properties of things", i.e. their real sizes. Cf.: object of type muraille, f; tour, f / the category of "too high" / not mentioned in conjunction with court, bas – "low, squat", on the contrary, names of the same classes, type haie, f; maison, f marked in combinations of the type une courte haie; une maison basse. Let us compare also the comic effect of combinations of type un énorme bonhomme or nonsense like "low skyscraper".

Let us note that in the area of spatial characteristics, the joint use of adjectives – antonyms is quite rare. The latter is obviously related to the importance of the spatial characteristics of the object for its definiteness, which excludes the variation of these characteristics hicetnunc. However, analysis of the language material shows that size adjectives can sometimes form antonymic oppositions within the same context. Namely, when there is a lack or indifference for the speaker of information about the size of the object, cf.: «Seraient-ce de grosses ou de petites?» (About the contents of a tin of canned food), or: "Quand on veut se marier, on ne regarde pas si elle est grande ou petite". Usually, different objects are contrasted with respect to size: a) belonging to the same class: des brocs... grands et petit; b) related to classes of similar objects: des mesures basses et une maison haute; "... j'eus droit à la culotte courte et aux pantalons longs..."; c) combined as names of parts of a single whole: un cavalier mince à la ceinture, large aux épaules. The simultaneous use of antonymous adjectives that are not separated from "zero" is typical, for example, vaste, "D>>Nr by area" and petit by volume" and grand, "D>Nr by volume": son corps menu porte solennellement une grande tête.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the material, it follows that size adjectives are combined into a lexical and semantic group that has a very clear internal structure. The latter is determined by the presence of synonymous, hyper-hyponymic, and antonymic relations that connect size adjectives in their various meanings.

But the boundaries of the LSG of size adjectives are not absolute: the periphery of the analyzed LSG is a "transition zone" between size adjectives – énorme, infime and adjectives of "modal-quantitative characteristics" – excessif, minime; etween size adjectives – gros, volumineux and adjectives of "form" – sphérique, plat, grêle, etc. Through their figurative meanings, size adjectives are related to "temporal" adjectives, cf.: long – "long, slow"; with adjectives of intellectual and moral evaluation, cf.: grand, haut и noble, loyal – "exalted, noble".

Also, through the signs of spatial and quantitative characteristics, size adjectives are associated with various lexical and semantic zones, as the quantitative feature is included in the meaning of so-called graded units – adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and the feature of spatial characteristics is included in the meaning of names of material objects, as well as verbs and prepositions of the French language.

The analysis of size adjectives also reveals some natural connections between various concepts in the human mind, for example: the feature "vertically oriented object" and the feature "structure"; the feature "large (in width, in length, in height)" and the feature of subjective evaluation; the feature "three-dimensionality, volume" and the feature "perception from the inside / perception from the outside".

We note that French lexical and semantic zone structure analysis provides interesting material for comparative analysis of the lexical and semantic system of the Russian and French languages, as well as the features of the nomination in the French and Russian languages.

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