Lexture 1

What is Lexicology?

I. The Subject of Lexicology

The term lexicology is of Greek origin (from lexis – word and logos -

science). Lexicology is the part of linguistics which deals with the vocabulary and characteristic features of words and word-groups.

The term word denotes the main lexical unit of a language resulting from the association of a group of sounds with a meaning. This unit is used in grammatical functions characteristic of it. It is the smallest unit of a language which can stand alone as a complete utterance.

The term word-group denotes a group of words which exists in the language as a ready-made unit, has the unity of meaning, the unity of syntactical function, e.g. the word-group as loose as a goose means clumsy and is used in a sentence as a predicative (He is as loose as a goose).

Lexicology can be general and special. General lexicology is the lexicology of any language, part of General Linguistics. It is aimed at establishing language universals – linguistic phenomena and propeties common to all languages.

Special lexicology is the lexicology of a particular language (English,

German, Russian, etc.).

Lexicology can study the development of the vocabulary, the origin of

words and word-groups, their semantic relations and the development of their

sound form and meaning. In this case it is called historical lexicology.

Another branch of lexicology is called descriptive and studies the

vocabulary at a definite stage of its development.

II. What is a Word?

First, the word is a unit of speech which, as such, serves the purposes of human communication. Thus, the word can be defined as a unit of communication.

Secondly, the word can be perceived as the total of the sounds which

comprise it.

Third, the word, viewed structurally, possesses several characteristics.

The modern approach to word studies is based on distinguishing between the external and the internal structures of the word.

By external structure of the word we mean its morphological structure. For example, in the word post-impressionists the following morphemes can be distinguished: the prefixes post-, im-, the root press, the noun-forming suffixes –ion, -ist, and the grammatical suffix of plurality –s.

The external structure of the word, and also typical word-formation patterns,are studied in the framework of word-building.

The internal structure of the word, or its meaning, is nowadays commonly referred to as the word‘s semantic structure. This is the word‘s main aspect.

The area of lexicology specialising in the semantic studies of the word is called semantics.

One of the main structural features of the word that it possesses both external (formal) unity and semantic unity.

A further structural feature of the word is its susceptibility to grammatical employment. In speech most words can be used in different grammatical forms in which their interrelations are realized.

Thus, the word is a speech unit used for the purposes of human

communication, materially representing a group of sounds, possessing a meaning, susceptible to grammatical employment and characterized by formal and semantic unity.

III. The Problem of Word-Boundaries

The difference between words and other two-facet units is not always clear.

There are:

1. Form words. On the one hand, they fuse with notional words phonetically and do not function as sentence-members. On the other hand, they are positionally mobile, e.g. a, to, and.

2. Loose compounds, e.g. speech sound, stone wall. On the one hand, theya are

built in speech. On the other hand, they have one lexical stress.

3. Phrasal words: his I-love-you‘s. On the one hand, they are built in speech and are not reproducible. On the other, they have one lexical stress.

The difference between variants of the same word and different words is also not always clear. Within the language system the word is a lexeme – an abstract unit which unites all its variant:

a) lexico-semantic variants – different meanings of the same polysemantic

word: to give a pen, to give a smile, to give an answer;

b) phonetic variants – different pronouncation of the same word: neither,

either, often;

c) orthographic variants – different spelling of the same word: jail – gaol;

d) morphological variants – different morphemic structure of the same word:

learned – learnt, geographic – geographical.

IV. Lexicology and its Connection with Other Linguistc Disciplines

Lexicology is closely connected with other branches of linguistcs:

1. It is connected with Phonetics because the word‘s sound form is a fixed sequence of phonemes united by a lexical stress.

2. Lexicology is connected with Morphology and Word-Formation as the

word‘s structure is a fixed sequence of morphemes.

3. It is connected with Morphology because the word‘s content plane is a unity of lexical and grammatical meanings.

4. The word functions as part of the sentence and performs a certain

syntactical function that is why it is also connected with Syntax.

5. The word functions in different situations and spheres of life therefore it is connected with Stylistics, Socio- and Psycholinguistics.

But there is also a great difference between lexicology and other linguistc disciplines. Grammatical and phonological systems are relatively stable. Therefore they are mostly studied within the framework of intralinguistics.

Lexical system is never stable. It is directly connected with extralinguistic systems. It is constantly growing and decaying. It is immediately reacts to changes in social life, e.g. the intense development of science and technology in the 20th century gave birth to such words as computer, sputnik, spaceship. Therefore lexicology is a sociolinguistic discipline. It studies each particular word, both its intra- and extralingiustic relations.

Lexicology is subdivided into a number of autonomous but interdependent disciplines:

1. Lexicological Phonetics. It studies the expression plane of lexical units in isolation and in the flow of speech.

2. Semasiology. It deals with the meaning of words and other linguistic

units: morphemes, word-formation types, morphological word classes and

morphological categories.

3. Onomasiology or Nomination Theory. It deals with the process of

nomination: what name this or that object has and why.

4. Etymology. It studies the origin, the original meaning and form of words.

5. Praseology. It deals with phraseological units.

6. Lexicography. It is a practical science. It describes the vocabulary and each lexical unit in the form of dictionaries.

7. Lexical Morphology. It deals with the morphological stricture of the word.

8. Word-formation. It deals with the patterns which are used in coining new words.