

Comparative Analysis of Quasi-Synonyms in Linguistics: Exploring Variation in Lexical and Semantic Overlaps

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses whether it is appropriate to use the term quasi-synonym when talking about a type of synonym that is currently of interest to many linguists and is used in some sources with the term near-synonym or plesionym, and in others with the term quasi-synonym.

Keywords: Quasi, near-synonym, plesionym, quasi-synonym, term-forming morpheme, quasi-relation, almost, quasi-superordinate, truth conditions.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of synonymy has a long history and is the most researched paradigmatic tool in linguistics and has attracted the attention and interest of many linguists. Our research shows that the definitions given to synonyms by world linguists do not negate each other, but it is significant that they use different approaches to classifying them and it is known that a number of synonyms belonging to same synonymous type are called by different names. However, it has been proven that different terms expressing the same type synonyms used by scientists are equivalent to each other. One of the types of synonyms included in the classification of such synonyms is a quasi-synonym, which is expressed by the term near-synonym or plesionym in the works of many linguists.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

According to Etymonline, the word *quasi* has been used as an adverb and adjective in English since the end of the 15th century. *Quasi*¹ derives from Latin and is used in hypothetical comparisons in the original Latin. This word comes from the Latin word *quam*, which in English means “as, almost.” According to Merriam-Webster’s annotated dictionary of the English language, as well as other dictionaries such as American Heritage and the Collins English Dictionary, the word *quasi* is often used as a morpheme that combines with other words. The word *quasi* can sometimes be used with or without a hyphen.

Word sense has published a list of words related to the term “quasi.” Below we have divided this list by sectors:

1. Medicine:	quasielastic, quasi-copula, quasi-molecular, quasi-material, quasistatic, quasipositive, quasi-permanent, quasi-hallucinatory, quasi-stationary, quasi-metallic, quasifission, quasi-optical, quasi-substance, quasispecies, quasi-dying, quasiaesthetic, quasidiploid;
2. Jurisprudence:	quasi-judicial, quasi-personal, quasi-official, quasi-ethical, quasi-implication, quasimple, quasi-ethically, quasi-marital, quasi-legal, quasi-statement, quasi-dereliction, quasi-marriage, quasi-nuptial, quasi-crime, quasi argument, quasinormal;
3. History:	quasi-public, quasi-romantic, quasi-ossianic, quasi-object, quasilocal, quasi-simultaneous, quasi-episcopal, quasi-feudal, quasi-fascist, quasi-historical, quasi-simultaneously, quasi-continuum, quasiperiodic, quasi-emperor;
4. Mathematics:	quasi-bialgebra, quasidihedral, quasiseperable, quasi-totality, quasimetric, quasi-horizontal, quasi-mathematical, quasitriangular, quasi-arithmetical;
5. Religious studies:	quasi-belief, quasi-religion, quasi-miraculous, quasi-miracle, quasi-existence, quasi-monastic, quasi-religious, quasi-deify, quasiamicable, quasi-divine, quasimodo;

6. Philosophy:	quasi-vacuity, quasi-object, quasi-philosophical, quasiprojective, quasi-logical, quasi-quotation, quasi-instantaneous, quasi-sensation, quasisteady, quasirandom, quasi-mythical, quasiromantic, quasiperfect;
7. Philology:	quasi-grammatical, quasimode, quasifunction, quasifield, quasi-modal, quasi-verb, quasicontraction, quasi-colloquial, quasiregular, quasitopological, quasidirect, quasi-definition, quasi-scientific, quasi-general, quasigroup, quasi-invariant, quasidominance;
8. Political science:	quasi-universal, quasi-partner, quasi-contract, quasi-war, quasi-purposive, quasi-contractual, quasi-continuous, quasi-governmental, quasi-independent, quasi-neutral, quasi-quote, quasi-neutrality, quasistability, quasinorm, quasi-success, quasi-totalitarian, quasi-military, quasimonopoly;
9. Astronomy:	quasi-stellar object, quasi-metaphysical, quasi-science, quasiplatonic, quasi-eternal, quasi-universal, quasi-stellar, quasi-physical, quasiballistic, quasiparticle;
10. Art:	quasi-jazz, quasi-classic, quasi-art;
11. Engineering:	quasi-mechanical, quasi-automatic, quasi-mechanistic, quasi-stellar radio source, quasithin, quasitransitive, quasitruncated, quasitechnical, quasi-crystalline, quasicrystal, quasi-thermodynamic, quasi-equilibrium, quasiatom, quasi-automatically, quasi-peak, quasi-semi;

So, *quasi* is considered term-forming morpheme, and it combines with words and forms a new term. In linguistics, Cruse (1986), one of the first linguists who used this term in the quasi-relations. But it gives little information about quasi-relations, not quasi-synonyms. “It not infrequently happens that an exactly appropriate lexical partner that would complete a paradigmatic relationship is missing, but a lexical item exists, with virtually the required meaning, but of the wrong syntactic category. In such cases we say that there is a quasi-relationship” that is, according to the linguist, quasi-relationship is a rare process in

which a clear and appropriate lexical relationship complements the paradigmatic relationship disappears, but the lexical element with the desired meaning remains in the word. Although they do not belong to the same syntactic category, they show a quasi-relationship. The scientist analyzes this view through the lexemes of knife, fork and spoon. It can be seen from the examples that they do not have a synonymous level, which means that they cannot form a synonymous group, but since they are all considered “cutlery,” this process seems as the first appearance of a quasi-relationship. So, according to the scientist, “cutlery” is a quasi-superordinate and the knife, fork and spoon are quasi-hyponyms. Also, the linguist will justify them on the example of colors. “Example concerns the colour adjectives *red, orange, yellow*, etc. There is no X such that *It’s red / yellow / green* entails *It’s X*. *Coloured* will not do, since in most contexts it excludes one or more of the colours in the incompatible set. Thus a *coloured photograph* cannot be simply black, white and grey; a *coloured pencil* excludes black; a *coloured sheet of notepaper* cannot be white, and so on. In this case, *colour* serves as a quasi-superordinate.”²

It is important to note that despite the fact that A. Cruse, one of the first linguist who introduced the term quasi into linguistics, he uses the terms plesionym and near-synonym when dividing synonyms into types and gives the following definition: “**Plesionyms** are distinguished from cognitive synonyms by the fact that they yield sentences with different truth-conditions: two sentences which differ only in respect of plesionyms in parallel syntactic positions are not mutually entailing, although if the lexical items are in a hyponymous relation there may well be unilateral entailment.”

We can see that L. Murphy’s view is consistent with Cruse’s (1986): “**Near-synonyms**: expressions that are more or less similar, but not identical, in meaning.”³ So, near-synonyms are similar in meaning, but they cannot replace each other due to slight differences in usage. Near-synonyms are words that require a context and are slightly different from their synonyms.

J. Lyons also writes about the near-synonym: “Many of the expressions listed as synonymous in ordinary or specialized

dictionaries are what may be called **near-synonyms**: expressions that are more or less similar, but not identical, in meaning. Typical examples of near-synonyms in English are ‘mist’ and ‘fog’, ‘stream’ and ‘brook’.”⁴ We can see that Di Marco, G. Hirst, and M. Stede gave a similar idea in their work: “If two words differ semantically (e.g., mist, fog), then substituting one for the other in a sentence or discourse will not necessarily preserve truth conditions; the denotations are not identical. If two words differ in stylistic features (e.g., frugal, stingy), then intersubstitution does preserve truth conditions, but the connotation--the stylistic and interpersonal effect of the sentence--is changed. Many of the semantic distinctions between plesionyms do not lend themselves to neat, taxonomic differentiation; rather, they are fuzzy, with plesionyms often having an area of overlap.”⁵

One of the famous Russian linguists, Ju. Apresjan, notes that words appearing in the same synonymous line in dictionaries cannot always be used interchangeably. Citing the example of “sink” and its synonym “drown,” he points out that “sink” is used of sunken ships, boats, etc., while “drown” is used of a drowned person. So, despite the fact that both words are united in the meaning of the word, they differ according to the scope of use. This feature shows that in many cases one of them cannot be used instead of the other. In this work, the linguist also tries to explain the differences between the words “breast-udder” and “tell-say” through examples. This theory led him to include the quasi-synonym type in the classification of synonyms. In his book *Lexical Semantics*, which was reprinted in 1995, the scientist researches quasi-synonyms in detail, and while studying them, he notes that quasi-synonyms are semantically different from exact synonyms, and their meaning does not completely match to each other.⁶

“There are very few if any absolute synonyms. The “dictionaries of synonyms” actually contain quasi-synonyms which are listed in clusters of similar words and explicate the differences between the words in each cluster. These dictionaries are in effect dictionaries of quasi-synonym discrimination. Writers can use such resources when choosing between quasi-

synonyms, because choosing the wrong word can be imprecise or awkward, or convey unwanted implications.”⁷ Considering that the Russian linguist S. Potemkin approved the opinion of his colleagues and called this type of synonym a quasi-synonym, even if this type of synonym has been used with various equivalents, it represents the same type of synonym. We can see that the term quasi-synonym is mostly used by Russian linguists such as Ju. Apresjan, Y. Nazaryan, L. Novikov, L. Balashova, and etc.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the 50s of the last century, when the study of synonyms from a scientific point of view began, and until now, the near-synonym often appears in sources with this name. But considering that the word “near” is not a term-forming unit, it is appropriate to use the “quasi” as a term forming morpheme.

Above, we mentioned the views of the famous linguists who contributed significantly to the development of the field of synonymy. We have also presented the opinion of scientists who are trying to deeply research quasi-synonyms. During our research, it became clear that the definitions given by world linguists to near-synonym, plesionym and quasi-synonym show that they represent the same type of synonym. This is because near-synonym, plesionym, and quasi-synonym are words that are close in meaning, but in many cases cannot be used interchangeably. The difference is that, unlike English linguists, Russian linguists used the term quasi-synonym more.

CONCLUSION

It can be said that the terms near-synonym, plesionym and quasi-synonym are different designations of the same synonym type, and at present the term quasi-synonym is increasingly used more in world linguistics. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that such diversity in naming exactly the same type of synonyms causes discomfort among young researchers and pupils. Therefore, achieving a unanimous opinion on the naming of types of

synonymy in modern linguistics will facilitate and accelerate the understanding of the phenomenon of synonymy in the future for researchers.

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