



TYPES AND WAYS OF SEMANTIC CHANGES IN  
LINGUISTICS OF THE 1990 s – BEGINNING OF  
THE XXI CENTURY

doi: 10.34142/astreaa.2020.1.1.08



**SYTNIAK Roman**

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor,  
Department of Germanic Languages,  
Horlivka institute for foreign languages HSEE  
«Donbass State Pedagogical University»  
84510, 24 Vasyliia Pershina Str., Bakhmut, Ukraine  
**E-mail:** sytniakromannest@gmail.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2630-3195>

**ABSTRACT**

The article deals with views of European language researchers of the 1990s. – beginning of the XXI century on the types and ways of semantic changes, semantic reconstruction and syncretism, existence of the European proto-language and close connection of semasiology and etymology. Among the most important goals of semasiology are classification of semantic changes and finding certain universal laws of such changes. Carrying out these tasks language researchers can't ignore the help of various linguistic and non-linguistic sciences which provide semasiology with numerous language facts and contribute to the building up a more or less complete picture of semantic changes nature. Accepting the idea of a proto-language existence is beneficial as it gives an exceptional opportunity to trace changes in meaning long back in history and enables linguists to find universal laws. Unfortunately, hypothetic nature of some results can't be avoided. That is why it is essential to go deep into diachronic investigation and select the most effective methods of linguistic studies. It is vital to identify and justify the scientific views on the principles of diachronic study of the semantic structure of words and reveal the patterns of development of comparative studies in such an important area of it as diachronic semasiology. The article is conducted in lingvo-historiographic aspect. It discloses the characteristic features of the research of the lexical meaning of words in the linguistics of the defined period. The development of other linguistic sciences such as etymology, has had a huge impact on the study of language, providing a

large number of artifacts from different epochs and cultures. This has contributed to the allocation of certain factors that affect the development of semantic words in different languages. The principles of semantic reconstruction have played a vital role in the development of diachronic semasiology as a separate branch of linguistics.

**Key words:** diachronic, divergence, extralinguistic, reconstruction, semasiology, synchronic, proto-language, universal laws.

## АНОТАЦІЯ

### Типи та шляхи семантичних змін в лінгвістиці 1990-х років - початок XXI століття

У статті розглянуті погляди європейських дослідників мови 90-х років ХХ ст. – початку ХХІ ст. на типи та способи семантичних змін, семантичної реконструкції та синкретизму, існування європейської прамови та тісного зв'язку семасіології та етимології. Предметом етимологічного аналізу є реконструкція форми та значення слів, первинної семантичної мотивації.

Серед найважливіших цілей семасіології – класифікація семантичних змін та пошук певних універсальних закономірностей таких змін.

Виконуючи ці завдання, дослідники мови не можуть ігнорувати допомогу різних лінгвістичних та нелінгвістичних наук, які забезпечують семасіологію численними мовними фактами та сприяють формуванню більш-менш повної картини природи смислових змін.

Прийняття ідеї існування прамови є вигідним, оскільки дає виняткову можливість простежити зміни значень задовго в історії та дає змогу лінгвістам знайти універсальні закони. Неможливість ігнорування схожих рис у багатьох мовах світу дає лінгвістам право говорити про певну історичну спільноту, яка володіла певною мовою – прамовою.

Виведення універсальних законів семантичних змін, які, безперечно, значно полегшили б дослідження у такій царині як компаративістика, так чи інакше захоплювало майже всіх учених, тому що вони виводяться через порівняння багатьох мовних систем, кожна з яких вважається добре дослідженою.

Складовими, яким, безперечно, необхідно приділяти велику увагу, є граматика, звукова структура та словниковий склад. Тільки таким чином можна отримати найбільш повну картину дослідження та якомога менше залишити місця для припущень. Серйозною перепоною процесу дослідження розглядався той факт, що, незважаючи на зв'язок, всі три вищезгадані системи мають здатність у більшості випадків змінюватися незалежно одна від одної. Тільки порівнявши всі пам'ятки, індоєвропейська приналежність яких не викликає сумнівів, ми можемо отримати науково достовірні знання про індоєвропейську прамову.

На жаль, гіпотетичного характеру деяких результатів не уникнути. Ось чому важливо заглибитись у діахронічне дослідження та обрати найбільш ефективні методи лінгвістичних досліджень.

**Ключові слова:** діахронія, дивергенція, екстралінгвістика, реконструкція, семасиологія, синхронія, прамова, універсальні закони.

## INTRODUCTION

The views of European language researchers of the 1990s. – beginning of the XXI century on the types and ways of semantic changes, semantic reconstruction and syncretism, existence of the European proto-language and close connection of semasiology and etymology are very interesting problems. Among the most important goals of semasiology are classification of semantic changes and finding certain universal laws of such changes. Carrying out these tasks language researchers can't ignore the help of various linguistic and non-linguistic sciences which provide semasiology with numerous language facts and contribute to the building up a more or less complete picture of semantic changes nature. Accepting the idea of a proto-language existence is beneficial as it gives an exceptional opportunity to trace changes in meaning long back in history and enables linguists to find universal laws.

## AIM OF THE ARTICLE

The aim is to go deep into diachronic investigation and select the most effective methods of linguistic studies.

## METHODOLOGY

The methods of using corpora, observation, fieldwork in linguistics analysis were used.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The question of the causes of semantic change remains relevant for linguists of many generations. According to V.V. Levitsky, the most famous semasiological classifications were made by S. Ullman, G. Kronasser, and K. Baldinger, with the later taking the works of A. Meillet, K. Yaberg, and other linguists.

K. Baldinger identifies five types of semantic change: linguistic (influence of context), cultural and historical (K. Jaberg's example: the invention of gunpowder and, as a consequence, the change in the value of Fr. *poudre* “dust > gunpowder”), social (word transition from one social sphere to another), mental (taboo, euphemisms, etc.) and psychological (synesthesia).

G. Kronasser identifies two main types with several subtypes: **A.** Primary causes: 1) stimuli of the outside world, which is sensed (disappearance, change and emergence of objects, states and actions); 2) psychic (taboo, comfort, desire for clarity, fear, irony, anger, etc.); 3) physiological (synesthesia). **B.** Secondary: 1) shift of synonyms in semantic fields; 2) infection in associations (the concept of association was introduced by G. Sperberg). The last and, according to G. Kronasser, the main reason for the change in the meaning of the word lies in the “divergence between

the limited number of words and the boundlessness of phenomena” (Kronasser, 1952, p. 192).

V.V. Levitsky, taking as a basis work on the semantics of the beginning of the second half of XX century, clarifies and supplements the above five classifications. He calls the reasons caused by the need for the speakers to express their thoughts and mark the objects of our environment cognitive or communicative, and the reasons caused by the need to reflect their feelings (what was called psychic, psychological and physiological at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), – emotional. What G. Kronasser calls secondary causes, and A. Meillet and K. Balinger – linguistic, is also specified by V. Levitsky from the point of view of modern linguistics. Considering the secondary causes, he emphasizes that: “... synonym shifts and contagion infections are factors of all kinds: synonym shifts are a phenomenon occurring in the language system and infections occur in the text (context)” (Levytskyi, 2006, p. 314).

Based on the works of G. Kronasser, M. Breal, S. Ullman, E. Velander, G. Sperber, G. Hatsfeld, O. Esperson, T. V. Stroeva, E. Williams, T. A. Degtyareva and other linguists, as well as his own research V. V. Levitsky offers a fairly complete, as in the modern view, classification of the causes of semantic changes, dividing them into two major classes:

A. Primary, non-linguistic reasons, due to the needs of communication in the general public, the need for speakers to communicate and express their thoughts and feelings: 1) cognitive, caused by the development of thinking, cognitive activity of the person, the need to name and express the concepts (here also should be reasons, namely: changes caused by the development of society, civilization); 2) emotional, driven by the need for speakers to express their thoughts.

B. Secondary, intra-linguistic reasons: 1) Syntagmatic: a) influence of changing context (narrowing, widening, shifting of context); b) the influence of grammatical function; c) infection; d) ellipses; e) the influence of a constant context; 2) paradigmatic: a) influence of sound analogy; b) the impact of sound symbolism; d) clashes of synonyms; e) the consequence of conflict between incompatible meanings of the word; e) the influence of other systemic relations in vocabulary (Levytskyi, 2006, p. 312–315).

The division of semantics into different types causes considerable difficulty in classifying semantic changes. Traditional linguistics does not deny the existence of morphological and syntactic semantics, but it attributes these areas of knowledge to the competences of various linguistic sciences (grammar and lexicology), thus emphasizing the fundamental difference between grammatical and lexical meaning. V. A. Zvegintsev very clearly demonstrates this difference, emphasizing that for a more complete characterization of the specifics of different kinds of linguistic meaning, in addition to the linguistic function, it is necessary to turn to additional, regular for the language, series of relations, namely: logical concepts, which are the product of our thinking, and objects of objective reality. There is no doubt that these

factors play a significant role in the qualitative characterization of the structural parts of the language and in some way determine the features of the different types of linguistic meaning.

Characterizing the specificity of different kinds of linguistic meaning, it is necessary to identify the relation of each of them with the above-mentioned series and to determine the forms of these relations. V. A. Zvegintsev emphasizes that the meanings of elements of the phonetic system of language do not correlate with logical concepts, objects and phenomena of objective reality. Since phonemes exist only for a particular language and are only relevant in the system of that language, the meaning of the phoneme is also closed in its system. Reflection of this closeness also explains the fact that none of the significant elements of the sound structure of a language can be correlated with the same elements of another language due to the lack of correlation with such linguistic and general categories as logic and objective reality (Zvegintsev, 1957, p. 97).

Even if the sounds in different languages are articulated exactly the same, it cannot be concluded that the same sound is included in the sound structure of different languages. These sounds operate under the laws of different phonetic systems, have different types of connections with other elements of their systems, and as a result, despite their external similarity, have different linguistic meanings.

Thus, the lack of correlation in phonetic values quite clearly separates this type of meaning from the other two: grammatical and lexical. V. A. Zvegintsev even speaks of a tendency to avoid the term “meaning” in relation to elements of phonetic structure, since, in his opinion, the term “meaning” is traditionally associated with subject-logical categories, whereas sounds have only functional meaning (1957).

Due to the correlation with the logical and subject lines, the grammatical and lexical meanings of words have many things in common, which makes them difficult to distinguish. But at the same time, there is a difference between them, which not only clearly separates them from phonetic values, but also from each other. As V.A. Zvegintsev clearly demonstrates in his work *Semasiology*, this difference is as follows:

1. Phonetic meanings have linguistic functions, but they have no relation and correlation with logical or subject lines.
2. The grammatical meanings have linguistic functions, and also correlate with the logical series, but have no substantive relation (they are deviated from the individual and the specific).
3. The lexical meaning has linguistic functions, as well as the connection with logical and subject lines.

The features of the abovementioned meanings manifest themselves both in the functioning of different types of linguistic meaning and in their development: “When identical grammatical categories (meanings) are compared, then they use logical concepts as the basis on which it is only possible to draw such a comparison. This is an appeal to the logical series. It allows you to set the overall logical moment

in the mapped grammar categories, and their difference will be determined by the language functions they perform in different languages. If we turn to lexical comparisons in different languages, their basis is, first and foremost, substantive attribution, and the difference will be due to the connection with different concepts and language functions” (Zvegintcev, 1957, p. 99).

The derivation of universal laws of semantic change, which would undoubtedly greatly facilitate comparative studies in one area or another, has fascinated almost all scholars because they are derived through the comparison of many linguistic systems, each considered well-researched. As a result, new expressions emerge that contain new knowledge that was not previously available in any of the descriptions of comparative language systems.

In linguistic materials, the term “universality of language” began to be actively used after the conference in New York on April 13-15, 1961, which was devoted specifically to language universals. The term “universality of language” was considered by the linguist Y.V. Rozhdestvensky to be somewhat unsuccessful, “... because the term calls a fundamentally new branch of linguistic research an old name, which bears the burden of many associations” (Rozhdestvenskii, 1968, p. 3).

Y.V. Rozhdestvensky notes that universals of language do not refer to metamorphic linguistics. It is typical for them to be distributed in any language. The universals of language, he emphasizes, are not concepts of the linguistic method, but they are derived on the basis of these concepts. In formulating a distinction between the concepts of the linguistic method and the universals of language, researchers usually do this with great care; it emphasizes that it is useless to refer linguistic universals to universal concepts relating to method theory. Y. V. Rozhdestvensky points out that universals of language, unlike the concepts of method theory, should be deduced from the empirics of languages, not deductively, since they are the result of an empirical study of the general properties of language systems (Rozhdestvenskii, 1968, p. 3).

In the linguistics of the twentieth century, especially in its second half, there was a constant debate about the expediency of synchronous and diachronic studies in one aspect or another. The point of view expressed by Y. V. Rozhdestvensky is interesting in this regard: “The conclusion of linguistic universals is not concerned with diachrony, since the fact of establishing cultural community and substantive affinity is not relevant here; but this does not apply to synchrony, since more than one system is always considered. ... Linguistic universals do not refer to the concepts of synchrony and diachrony; it seems appropriate to refer them to the panchrony” (Rozhdestvenskii, 1968, p. 10).

By panchrony, a scientist understands such a connection between synchronic linguistic systems, which depends not on cultural and historical factors, but only on the properties of the system and its implementation in the material of the so-called “natural languages”.

On the basis of universal definitions, Y.V. Rozhdestvensky proposes the possible varieties of linguistic universals that can be applied in semantics as well: 1. Absolute (or complete) universals, characteristic of all languages. 2. Universal implications: “If the phenomenon A is present, then the existing phenomenon B». 3. Statistical universals: “for most languages, there is ...”. 4. Statistical correlations: “in most languages phenomenon A indicates the presence of phenomenon B” (Rozhdestvenskii, 1968, p. 10).

B.O. Serebrennikov also noted that the interpretation of language universals is ambivalent (1972). First of all, the concept of universals includes the so-called absolute universals, which are available in all languages. However, he spoke about the desire of the researchers of this problem to bring to the notion of universals and such phenomena that do not actually show signs of general, absolute prevalence. This category should fall under such general laws or trends that are highly likely for different languages or languages in the course of their temporal existence. These so-called diachronic universals, according to the scientist, are probabilistic in nature.

B.O. Serebrennikov, considering the fact that universals exist alongside so-called “frequentalias” (phenomena of high frequency), suggested the most successful in his opinion definition: “Language universality is the same isomorphic way of expressing intra-system correlations of linguistic elements by its nature, a process that exhibits high frequency in different languages of the world” (Serebrennikov, 1972, p. 5).

The principle of equality, said B.O. Serebrennikov, should also apply to semantic universals (for example, the connection of the name “mouth of the river” with the word “mouth” observed in many languages) (Serebrennikov, 1972, p. 5).

Much attention has always been paid to the study of semantic patterns. S. Ullman noted that by looking carefully at the various semantic laws and other universals considered, which either were not clearly or explicitly formulated in the linguistics of the past, one common feature could be identified – almost all of them based on insufficient material. Too often, far-reaching conclusions are drawn from unreliable data from a limited number of languages. The predicted universals thus obtained were in many cases quite plausible, but plausibility is not proof. “Besides, by its very nature,” urged S. Ullman, “most semantic universals are merely statistical probable regularities, and the probability of having them in a particular language can only be determined if the researchers have much larger and more expansive ones than the data we have now” (Ullman, 1970, p. 251).

With regard to the meaning and use of the term “universal”, S. Ullman warned scientists to use it very carefully when this concept is applied to semantic phenomena, which often have to deal with inaccurate and subjective. Phenomena and processes regarding their significance, S. Ullman assured, can be divided into three broad categories.

1. Some of them may be “absolute universals”. But first-class universals will only be “absolute” in the sense that they occur in many languages. We, the scientist

insisted, will never be able to convincingly prove that these phenomena are panchronic, that is, they exist in every language at any stage of its development.

2. Most semantic universals are statistical in nature: they do not need to be represented in every language, but one way or another can predict the likelihood of them being present. It should be added that certain semantic phenomena have not yet been described with sufficient precision and therefore cannot be rigorously analyzed; only a rough probability estimate can be applied to them.

3. Another type of general phenomena presented by S. Ullman is close to universals, but much more limited in distribution (1972). These are the results of the parallel development of a word that occurs in a certain group of languages but does not go beyond it. Many types of metaphor and other forms of semantic change are included: they are so widespread that the fact that they are present in different languages cannot be considered a mere coincidence, but not so much that it is statistically significant. Of course, there is always the possibility of converting such a phenomenon in many languages into a statistical universal, if its scope is wide enough, and then this case will be reduced to the previous one.

4. In addition to these categories of general phenomena, S. Ullman's opinion does not merit consideration of the problem of typological criteria, since there are obvious links between this problem and the problem of universals. Semantic typology has been poorly studied, but if one or two criteria are developed, they will be discussed in the relevant chapters of linguistics.

In semantics, as in other fields of linguistics, there are obviously universals of two kinds – synchronic and diachronic, but in practice it is not always easy to separate one from the other. It is advisable to single out another third class of semantic universals – those that go beyond individual words and are related to the general structure of the dictionary (Ulmann, 1970, p. 253–254).

W. Weinreich wrote that semantic universals are a matter of linguistics, where, despite a great deal of research, there is no such unity of views as is observed in other aspects of linguistics. If it were necessary to characterize in a few words those universal semantic properties about which the opinions of linguists more or less coincide, then it would obviously have to be confined to such two statements.

a) All languages are special systems of information transmission that are different from other, non-linguistic, semiotic systems.

b) The semantic membership (mapping) of reality in one language or another is arbitrary, and the semantic “map” of any one language differs from the semantic “maps” of all other languages (Veinreikh, 1970, p. 163).

### **Semantic reconstruction and syncretism**

Indo-European speech. The reconstruction of the lexical meaning of words is one of the topical and promising issues of modern linguistics. Research planning necessarily involves the division of languages into kinship and non-kinship, and the definition of commonality between the former and the later testifies to their



historical origins ... why? The inability to ignore similar features in many languages of the world gives linguists the right to speak about a particular historical community that spoke a particular language – a proto-language.

The question that still raises controversy is – did the Indo-European speech really exist? The point here is not to prove that there was no such language, but rather, to the contrary, to identify sufficient evidence of the existence of a single language in a particular geographical area. This is somewhat reminiscent of the presumption of innocence – unless sufficient evidence is provided to support a particular hypothesis, it is considered scientifically unfounded and unproven.

The fact is that the achievement of historical linguistics provides us with enough material, on the basis of which we can speak about the high probability of the existence of a single language – a proto-language. The number of coincidences, wrote J. Audrey, and their correspondence, established at all levels of the linguistic system of ancient Indo-European languages, make the common Indo-European language, if not tangible reality, a scientifically valid hypothesis. “There is no doubt that there was a language that was, for all Indo-European languages, the Latin language for Romance languages, and is a common language (a proto-language), from which they came out in a frequently repeated pattern: the fragmentation of speech into dialects, and then, according to the corresponding ones, historical conditions (political changes and geographical dislocation of the community), the splitting and emergence of new languages, some of which in turn become speeches; this cycle can be repeated and start over again” (Odri, 1988, p. 119–120).

A. Meillet agreed that all languages were grouped around some original common language. He was convinced that the researcher, in restoring the common language, should not draw conclusions on a case by case basis, but only by comparing one language system with another. Stressing that it is almost never possible to compare reconstruction with the reality we know, the scientist nevertheless warned against the use of a single fact, for example, in the Romance languages. However, he was convinced that no reconstruction was able to present the common language as it was in the live version. That is why, noting A. Schleicher's restoration of Indo-European speech by the historically attested languages of this family as an ingenious innovation, A. Meillet considered it a grave mistake to write the text on this reconstructed speech.

The languages developed from the common language, according to A. Meillet, not only retain certain long-standing characteristics, but also a stable tendency for identical or similar tumors. As a result, some elements of the common language disappear without a trace or leave traces so weak that they cannot be seen unless the common language is actually known. Comparisons show a system of comparisons that can be used to build a language family history; but such a comparison does not represent a real language with all its expressive means (Meie, 1954, p. 22).

The conditions of language development, the French scientist argued, must be common to all types of people or to a particular type of civilization, to preserve its unity. But there are also conditions specific to certain societies, certain historical periods, certain territories. These special conditions also cause the language, which has been the only one during a certain period, to be broken up over time into different speeches (Meie, 1954, p. 82).

In order to establish the existence of an ancient speech, A. Meillet considered it necessary to find linguistic features preserved in comparative languages. He regarded grammar, sound structure, and vocabulary as components that, of course, needed attention in order to obtain the most complete picture of the study and to leave as little room for conjecture as possible. Among the difficulties of the research process was the fact that despite the connection, all three of the above systems have the ability in most cases to change independently of each other (Meie, 1954, p. 34).

N. A. Slyusareva in the article “Problems of linguistic semantics” notes that the semantics of the largest linguistic units reflect the results of reproduction in the minds of people of an objectively existing world, so to speak, of basic concepts that have been formed throughout the history of mankind. The effort to find the seven common languages (semantic factors, semantic functions) in many languages, apparently, she points out, is aimed specifically at this sphere, although it seems that the meanings of words are revealed through the smallest units. “This manifests the dialectic of cognition: the smaller the semantic unit, the greater its volume, the more universally implemented it is in the languages; the juxtaposition of “male - female – baby” appears as a manifestation of minimal semantic features, but, in general, as a category peculiar to the animal world, including man” (Sliusareva, 1973, p. 22).

V. P. Neroznak in his article “Speech: Construct or Reality?” Calls a particular problem the reconstruction of so-called intermediate speeches, between the speech state of the family (Indo-European speech) and the speech state of certain language groups (Slavic, Pro-Iranian, Pro-Celtic, etc.), which in Indo-European studies are called linguistic unities (proto-languages): Baltic-Slavic, Italian-Celtic, Indo-Iranian language unities. This problem, like others, notes V. P. Neroznak, associated with the reconstruction of speech states of different order, must be solved within the framework of the theory of linguistic unity (Neroznak, 1988, p. 36).

J. Audrey criticizes the efforts of linguists, in particular M. Trubetskoy, to reject the hypothesis of the existence of Indo-European proto-language, not because of its unreality, but because of its needlessness, for trying to ignore what might be the basis for understanding the driving force of language, its life and laws.

The attempt to disregard the existence of Indo-European proto-language is reminiscent of the deliberate disregard of lexical meaning in the process of historical reconstruction, which was astonishing and sometimes disturbing L. Bloomfield, V. A. Zvegintsev, R.O. Budagov, V. I. Abaev.

Yes, hypothetic nature has always frightened linguists, but hypothesis is the beginning of scientific inquiry that begins with assumptions and, beyond facts, is often to some extent based on them.

J. Audrey believed that the rejection of Indo-European proto-language, the explanation of coincidences in unrelated languages by borrowing, together with the concept of a proto-language, the concept of Indo-European people. “But if, as all this points out, there was no common language, does it make sense to question the existence of its carriers?” (Odri, 1988, p. 120).

This is confirmed by the work of T. V. Gamkrelidze and Vyach. Vs. Ivanov's “Indo-European Language and Indo-Europeans”. Here with the help of certain facts of Indo-European speech, the life of the ancient people, its culture is reproduced.

In his article “Sanskrit and Other Languages of Ancient Europe” M. Mayrhofer mentions the statement of Sir William Jones, a member of the High Court of Calcutta, made in 1786. It was a matter of antiquity of Sanskrit, and in spite of this, its superiority over Greek and Latin in its sophistication and linguistic richness. The main idea was to prove the similarity of these three languages at different levels – roots, words, grammar. M. Mayrhofer convinced that the commonality in traits was so great that no philologist comparing these languages had any doubt about their origin from a single source (Mairkhofer, 1988, p. 506).

V. P. Neroznak believed that the question of the reality of a proto-language, its forms of expression in reconstructed models, should be resolved with reference to three basic criteria: 1) traditional methods of comparative-historical research, covering all procedures and techniques of reconstruction (phonetic-phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical-grammatical); 2) typology data that take into account the variety of structures of linguistic units; 3) the theory of linguistic unities that interpret speech and other types of genetic and areal-genetic unities in terms of multivalued classifications (Neroznak, 1988, p. 36).

One of the controversial issues remains the establishment of time, at least approximate, framework for the emergence of Indo-European proto-language. In his article “The Problem of the Emergence of Indo-European Languages” V. I. Georgiev suggested that certain Indo-European languages were designed as early as the third millennium BC. Changes in society, he noted, were extremely slow in the primitive community. That is why, if it is possible to establish any linguistic facts that date back to the end of the communal era, it seems possible to attribute them to a much later period (Georgiev, 1956, p. 48).

However, there are scholars who question the existence of Indo-European proto-language. Among them, the Italian researcher V. Pisani: “We have created for ourselves a myth unavailable for verification because it belongs to the prehistoric period, that is, to a period from which we cannot have specific documents. If such documents appeared, prehistory would turn into history. Based on this myth, we have built science; and since this science fails, if such a myth is proved to be

illusory, we must consider it an indisputable truth and assume no doubt about it” (Pizani, 1966, p. 5).

It may not even be a complete denial of the existence of Indo-European proto-language, but of granting the researcher some freedom to put forward hypotheses that may compete with those already in existence, and in no case, as V. Pisani put it, undermine the importance of the historical-comparative method for modern linguistics. “This is exactly what I want to emphasize: I am in no way going to destroy the comparative method by which, by the way, I make my claims, but I want to find out what really underlies our comparisons” (Pizani, 1966, p. 6).

V. Pisani asserted: “... the various linguistic families – German, Slavic, Baltic, Celtic and others – are not independent and monolithic groups that arose from the splitting of the same monolithic Indo-European proto-language, but are the result of the spread of certain phenomena from one or more centers which, for political or other reasons, spread over a certain territory in different ways in the Indo-European and partly non-Indo-European languages spoken by the population of that territory” (Pizani, 1966, p. 4).

He argued that individual dialects, as a result of such evolution, possessing a number of common isoglosses, can retain numerous peculiarities, demonstrating their belonging to ancient linguistic phases that precede the time of relative linguistic unity.

We see that, while proposing new hypotheses and denying the indispensable existence of Indo-European proto-language, V. Pisani has in fact come close to the main principle of the origin of several from the common. Not accepting the idea of splitting the monolith, he proposes the idea of propagation of phenomena from one or more. As you know, nothing new can be built from nothing; and the Italian researcher's efforts to state his hypotheses can be explained by a desire to go his own way, albeit in a common direction.

V. Pisani suggested focusing his efforts on reconstructing particular linguistic phenomena: “Therefore, comparative Indo-European linguistics has the full right to exist only if it is limited to the comparison of phenomena and reconstruction of ‘proto-events’, but not of ‘proto-language’” (Pizani, 1966, p. 10).

We can only gain knowledge of Indo-European proto-language by comparing the languages represented in those written facts whose Indo-European identity is undeniable. We have evidence of such languages throughout China from Turkmenistan to Spain and Ireland since the 19th century B.C. (Anatolian languages) to the XV century. (Albanian).

The existence of some Indo-European languages – writes modern French linguist F. Bader – we can only guess by observing their traces in toponymics or forms that are often different from those expected. He rightly points out that here we are totally dependent on the arrival of new facts. The discovery of the Tocharian language in the early twentieth century, then the understanding of the Hittite language (1916) somewhat shook the image of Indo-European proto-language,

which was reconstructed in the nineteenth century mainly based on the relationship between Greek and Indo-Iranian. The discovery of new facts from the continental Celtic, F. Bader writes, forces us to reconsider our understanding of the common Celtic language known by that time. He also notes that it is unlikely to be considered once and for all. As an example, F. Bader cites some languages, which are now regarded as Indo-European, and in the mid-twentieth century the “Langues du monde” (1952) was not included in Indo-European languages (Bader, 1988, p. 202).

Renowned Hungarian and English linguist O. Semereni was also convinced that the reconstruction of ancient forms corresponds to the state of linguistics at the relevant historical stage. “... One cannot but admit that each reconstruction reflects the appropriate level of development of linguistics. As a consequence, the reconstructed form, as well as the natural scientific theory, should be modified and improved in accordance with new discoveries. In fact, our reconstructions ... are ‘better’ than those we operated a hundred years ago, that is, they are more in line with historical facts” (Semereni, 2002, p. 37). The scientist spoke first of all about phonetic reconstruction, but its principles in this sense can be considered universal. V. P. Neroznak wrote that it is precisely why our knowledge of the prehistoric stages of language development is in constant motion that the speech model itself changes periodically, that is, the paradigm of knowledge changes. Because of this, he assured, the speech model can never be reconstructed as reality. It emerges as a model of historically evolving knowledge, reflecting the current state of comparative historical linguistics. This linguistics relies not only on the techniques of genetic reconstruction (internal or external), but also on the achievement of synchronous linguistics, above all typological (Neroznak, 1988, 36).

### **Semasiology and etymology**

The purpose of modern etymology is to determine in what language, at what historical stage, on the basis of which primary motivation and, accordingly, from which word, by which word-forming model and with what primary meaning the word is formed, as well as to find out the ways and reasons for transformation its primary form and significance have been around for a long time until the present state. Reconstruction of the primary motivation, form and meaning of the word are the subject of etymological analysis.

The purpose of semantic reconstruction is the transformation of primitive content (denotative meaning), which is possible only through the study of the stages of development of word semantics, the evolution of human thought. And this is certainly related to various linguistic and extralinguistic factors. Famous scientists such as S. Abaev, O. M. Trubachev, V. V. Levitsky emphasize the crucial role of etymological research in this process. Of course, the benefit is two-sided: “The importance of word semantics for the work of the etymologist is quite obvious; this is the case when the truth needs no proof and the scope of its use is extremely wide” (Levytskyi, 2006, p. 64).

Speaking about what the semantics of etymology gives, O. M. Trubachev considers it expedient to ask what etymology does for semantics. He is convinced that no linguistic discipline collects such complete information about the meaning of a word as etymology, which, for the sake of its research, has combined modern data, historical written memorials, transcriptional reconstruction, and semantic typology. Misunderstanding or deliberately ignoring the help of etymology in the reconstruction of the semantic meaning of the word, warns O. M. Trubachev, will inevitably lead to a lack of material to explain certain speech phenomena, attempts to get help from other sciences. Of course, psychology, philosophy, cultural studies and other fields of knowledge make a great contribution to semasiological studies, but without etymology many results will acquire some artificiality and groundlessness. The researcher is convinced of the mutual benefit of the collaboration of the two sciences.

### CONCLUSION

Most contemporary linguists see wide perspectives in diachronic studies in semasiology, emphasizing the unsatisfactory state of the quality of research in this field. Recognizing the complexity and certain capriciousness of the ways of semantic development of words, we are sure that arbitrariness and chaos do not always reign in this sphere. Semantic changes and types of motivation are only partly explained by the general patterns of human thinking.

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**Competing Interests:** The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

### References

- Bader, F. (1988). Oblasti indoevropskoi rekonstrukcii [Indo-European Reconstruction Areas]. *Novoe v lingvistike*, 21, 202–223. (in Russian)
- Georgiev, V. I. (1956). Problema vozniknoveniia indoevropskikh iazykov [Problem of the Origin of Indo-European Languages]. *Voprosy iazykoznanii*, 1, 43–67. (in Russian)
- Kronasser, H. (1952). *Handbuch der Semasiologie*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- Levytskyi, V. V. (2006). *Semasiolohiia* [Semasiology]. Vinnytsia: NOVA KNYHA. (in Ukrainian)
- Mairkhofer, M. (1988). Sanskrit i yazyki drevnei Evropy [Sanskrit and the Languages of Ancient Europe]. *Novoe v lingvistike*, 21, 507–531.
- Meie, A. (1954). *Sravnitelnyi metod v sravnitelnom iazykoznanii* [Comparative Method in Comparative Linguistics]. Moscow: Izdatelstvo Inostrannoi literatury. (in Russian)
- Neroznak, V. P. (1988). Praiazyk: rekonstrukt ili realnost? [Proto-language: Reconstruction or Reality]. In N.Z. Gadzhieva (Ed.), *Sravnitelno-istoricheskoe izuchenie iazykov raznykh semei. Teoriia lingvisticheskoi rekonstrukcii* (pp. 26–43). Moscow: Nauka. (in Russian)

- Odri, Zh. (1988). Sovremennoe indoevropeskoe sravnitelno-istoricheskoe iazykoznanie [Modern Indo-European Comparative Historical Linguistics]. *Novoe v lingvistike*, 21, 24–121. (in Russian)
- Pizani, V. (1966). K indoevropeskoi probleme [To the Indo-European Problem]. *Voprosy iazykoznanii*, 4, 3–21. (in Russian)
- Rozhdestvenskii, Iu. V. (1968). O lingvisticheskikh universaliiakh [About Linguistic Universals]. *Voprosy iazykoznanii*, 2, 3–13. (in Russian)
- Semereni, O. (2002). Vvedenie v sravnitelnoe iazykoznanie [Introduction to Comparative Linguistics]. Moscow: Editorial USSR. (in Russian)
- Serebrennikov, B. A. (1972). O lingvisticheskikh universaliiakh [About Linguistic Universals]. *Voprosy iazykoznanii*, 2, 3–16. (in Russian)
- Sliusareva, N. A. (1973). Problemy lingvisticheskoi semantiki [Problems of Linguistic Semantics]. *Voprosy iazykoznanii*, 5, 13–23. (in Russian).

**Received:** 10.12.2019

**Accepted:** 18.01.2020

**Cite this article as:**

Sytniak, R. (2020). Types and ways of semantic changes in linguistics of the 1990 s – beginning of the xxi century. *Astraea*, 1(1), 129–143. doi: 10.34142/astreaa.2020.1.1.08

