



THE CONCEPT OF GRADUAL SEMANTICS AND ITS PLACE IN MODERN LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the concept of gradual semantics as an important category in modern linguistic theory. Gradual semantics is understood as the ability of language to represent different degrees of intensity, quantity, quality, and evaluation of objects, actions, and states. The study analyzes the theoretical foundations of graduality, its relationship with such linguistic categories as intensity, comparison, evaluation, and norm. Special attention is paid to the cognitive and functional aspects of gradual semantics, as well as its manifestation at various language levels: lexical, morphological, syntactic, and textual. The article also discusses the role of gradual semantics in shaping the linguistic picture of the world and its relevance for contemporary linguistic research. The analysis demonstrates that gradual semantics occupies a central position in modern linguistics due to its close connection with human cognition, categorization, and evaluative activity

Modern linguistics is characterized by a growing interest in semantic categories that reflect human perception, cognition, and evaluation of reality. Language is no longer viewed solely as a formal system of signs but as a complex mechanism that encodes human experience and conceptualization of the world. One of the key categories that reveal this connection between language and cognition is gradual semantics. Gradual semantics refers to the linguistic representation of degrees and scales, allowing speakers to express varying intensities and qualities of phenomena. This category plays a crucial role in everyday communication, scientific discourse, artistic language, and evaluative judgments [1–3].

The relevance of studying gradual semantics lies in its interdisciplinary nature. It intersects with cognitive linguistics, functional grammar, pragmatics, and discourse analysis. Despite extensive research, the status and scope of gradual semantics remain subjects of scholarly debate, which makes further investigation necessary [4–6]. The aim of this article is to define the concept of gradual semantics, analyze its main features, and determine its place in modern linguistic theory.

Gradual semantics is based on the idea that many linguistic meanings are not discrete but continuous. Instead of binary oppositions, language often operates with scales and degrees,

such as *hot – warm – cool – cold* or *good – better – best* [7]. From a semantic perspective, graduality reflects the non-categorical nature of human perception. People tend to perceive reality as a continuum rather than as a set of rigidly defined categories. Language mirrors this perception by providing tools to express intermediate and relative meanings [8].

In linguistic theory, gradual semantics has been studied within the framework of functional grammar, where it is associated with the expression of quantitative and qualitative characteristics of situations and entities [9]. Researchers emphasize that gradual meanings are context-dependent and often subjective, which links them to evaluation and pragmatics.

One of the most important aspects of gradual semantics is its close relationship with evaluation. Any expression of degree implicitly or explicitly involves an evaluative component, as it presupposes a comparison with a certain norm or standard [10].

Evaluation can be positive, negative, or neutral, and gradual semantics allows speakers to fine-tune their judgments. For example, expressions such as *slightly interesting*, *very interesting*, and *extremely interesting* differ not only in intensity but also in the speaker's attitude toward the object [11].

In this sense, gradual semantics functions as a tool for expressing subjective experience and emotional involvement. It plays a significant role in persuasive discourse, artistic texts, and everyday communication [12].

From a cognitive perspective, gradual semantics reflects fundamental mechanisms of human thinking. Categorization, comparison, and scaling are essential cognitive processes that enable people to structure and interpret reality [13]. Cognitive linguistics emphasizes that gradable concepts are grounded in human experience and embodied cognition. For instance, spatial and physical experiences often serve as the basis for abstract gradable meanings, such as *high status*, *deep emotions*, or *strong argument* [14].

Thus, gradual semantics serves as a bridge between linguistic form and cognitive content, highlighting the anthropocentric nature of language.

At the lexical level, gradual semantics is expressed through gradable adjectives, adverbs, and verbs, as well as intensifiers and degree modifiers (*very*, *quite*, *extremely*, *slightly*) [13].

Synonymic series often form gradual scales that reflect subtle semantic differences, for example: *big – large – huge – enormous*. Such lexical gradation enriches the expressive potential of language [6].

Morphological means of expressing gradual semantics include comparative and superlative forms, as well as affixes that convey diminution or augmentation. These forms are widely used across languages to express relative degrees of qualities and quantities [7]. Morphological markers of graduality are particularly important in evaluative and expressive contexts, where they contribute to the speaker's subjective stance [8].

At the syntactic level, gradual semantics is realized through comparative constructions, parallelism, repetition, and enumeration. These structures create a cumulative effect of intensification or attenuation [9].

On the textual level, graduality can organize discourse by structuring information flow and emphasizing key points. Gradual buildup of arguments or descriptions is a common rhetorical strategy in both spoken and written discourse [2].

In modern linguistics, gradual semantics occupies an important place within several theoretical frameworks. Functional linguistics views graduality as a means of adapting language to communicative needs.

In cognitive linguistics, gradual semantics is associated with prototype theory and fuzzy categories, which challenge traditional binary classifications [2]. Pragmatics examines how context influences the interpretation of gradable expressions. Discourse analysis focuses on the role of gradual semantics in constructing meaning across larger stretches of text, highlighting its interaction with coherence and cohesion.

The study of gradual semantics has significant implications for understanding language as a dynamic and flexible system. It demonstrates how linguistic meaning emerges from the interaction between form, cognition, and context.

Moreover, gradual semantics is essential for cross-linguistic and intercultural studies, as different languages and cultures may conceptualize scales and norms differently [5].

Thus, gradual semantics remains a productive field of research in contemporary linguistics, contributing to the development of integrative and interdisciplinary approaches.

The analysis shows that gradual semantics is a fundamental linguistic category that reflects the continuous nature of human perception and evaluation of reality. It is closely connected with cognition, evaluation, and discourse organization.

Gradual semantics occupies a central place in modern linguistics, as it provides insights into how language encodes degrees, scales, and subjective judgments. Further research in this area can enhance our understanding of linguistic meaning and its cognitive foundations

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