English Last Wills and Testaments: towards the systemic description of the genre vocabulary

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Abstract. This article is aimed at the systemic description of the body of words used in English Last Wills and Testaments. The corpus of research contains 100 English Last Wills and Testaments written between 1837 and 2000. The suggested approach to the description is based on the notion of semantic field. Having accepted the traditional definition of semantic field as a group of words possessing the same conceptual meaning, characterized by certain relations between lexemes and belonging to the same part of speech, the author singles out seven semantic fields which occur in English Last Wills and Testaments: 1) process/circumstances of testament; 2) testator and heir; 3) object of testament; 4) death and funeral; 5) execution/witnessing of testament; 6) date of making a testament; 7) geographical names. It is substantiated that the relations between the lexemes in each field are mainly based on synonymy and hyponymy. Some subfields are defined by relations of antonyms, or arranged in a cycle.
Keywords: semantic field, synonymy, hyponymy, antonymy, Last Will and Testament.

Introduction. A Last Will and Testament as a legal document of Inheritance Law is of particular importance for the life of modern societies of all developed countries. However, the study of the genre of legal discourse has not yet been the object of linguistic research. This article presents the result of the analysis of English Last Wills and Testaments from the point of view of their lexical space, in particular semantic groups of verbs and nouns that are characteristic of this genre.

Overview of publications related to the theme. The language of law is a tool for legal regulation in society and has a number of distinctive features due to needs of the legal communication. Language learning is an integral part of legal discourse genres in the modern paradigm of discursive linguistic studies. Last Will and Testament as one of those genres is the focus of attention in this article. It is regarded as a communicative action, which is implemented by means of performative speech act (3, p. 127-133).

This article presents an attempt to cover one aspect of the genre research, namely its vocabulary, exploiting the classical notions of semantic field.

The notion of semantic field has been the topic of controversial discussions in $20 - 21$ centuries. Scholars have been trying to define this notion and to specify principles of dividing lexemes into groups based on their meanings. The analysis of various theories of semantic field makes it possible to conclude that there are two main approaches: traditional field semantics and modern frame semantics. B. Nerlich and D. Clark claim that both approaches study groups of words that belong together under the same conceptual heading and that conceptual fields and frames reflect the words as experienced by the users of a language. The authors state that in 1970s the concept of *frame* was just as much in the air as the concept of *field* had been in the 1930s [13, p.126 – 141].

The study of semantic field theory is traced back to the ideas of the famous German linguist of the 19th century W. von Humboldt, but it was J. Trier who developed semantic field theory in 1930s. He proposed the notion of a *linguistic field* and based it on a number of explicit theorems and definitions and tried to establish a unified theory. He also claimed that to understand the meaning of a word one has to understand the structure of the group within which the word plays its role and that this structure has its being precisely because of the existence of the other words and have clear boundaries taking into consideration other neighboring units. His conception of the field stressed that the vocabulary of a synchronic stage of a language is organized according to its content or has a hierarchical relationship [16]. B. Nerlich and D. Clark believe that Trier's semantic field theory is significant for

the advancing discussion of such main claims: 1) the vocabulary of a language system is semantically related and builds up a complete lexical system which undergoes changes; 2) since the vocabulary of a language is semantically related, one is not supposed to study the semantic change of individual words in isolation, but to study vocabulary as an integrated system; 3) since lexemes are semantically interrelated, linguists can determine connotations of words by analyzing and comparing their semantic relationships with other words [13]. A word is meaningful only in its own semantic field. Trier's semantic field is generally considered paradigmatic. It deals with paradigmatic relations between words such as hyponymy, synonymy and antonymy.

Trier himself didn't use the term semantic field. It was employed by G. Ipsen, A. Jolls and W. Porzig. Indeed Ipsen was the first to use the term *semantic field.* In his research on Indo-European terms associated with the field metals he applied it to a set of words which have common morphological and semantic marks. He limited the boundaries of the field by formal and functional assimilation of their components and based it on the analysis of the internal relation of the co-occurrence between words. His analysis dealt with the probability for a lexical item to co-occur with others in the same context. They are bound together by what W. Porzig called essential meaning-relations. The author concentrated on the syntagmatic relations of lexical items, where the use of one determines the appearance of the other [11, p. 190-192].

A. Jolles in opposition to J. Trier proposed a field theory of his own which he rooted in the work of the ancient grammarian Dionysius Thrax. His fields are minimal each with only two members [8, p. 27-28].

A. Lehrer in 1970s defined semantic field as a set of lexemes which cover a certain conceptual domain and which bear certain specifiable relations to one another [12, p. 119]. The goal of his semantic field theory is to look at sets of semantically related words (but not at each word in isolation) in order to understand lexical meaning. He singles out three characteristic features of any semantic field: 1) the vocabulary of a language is essentially a dynamic and well-integrated system of lexemes structured by relationship of meaning; 2) it is changing continuously as a result of the impact of various forces such as the disappearance of previously existing lexemes, the appearance of new ones, and the broadening or narrowing of the meaning of other lexemes; 3) it is characterized by the relationships of synonymy and antonymy, hierarchical, general-particular and part-whole relationships as well as relationships of sequences and cycles [12, p. 283].

D. Crystal talks about semantic field (he also calls it lexical field) as a relationship between whole sets of lexemes belonging to a particular area of meaning [9, p. 137]. He mentions several reasons of difficulties in assigning the lexemes in English to a semantic field: 1) some lexemes belong to fields which are very difficult to define; 2) some lexemes belong to more than one field; 3) some lexemes fall midway between two fields. The author suggests two ways of defining a semantic field. Firstly, he points at a fact that a very large number of lexemes can be grouped together into fields and subfields in a fairly clear-cut way. On the other hand, however, the attribution of some lexemes to a semantic field is problematic. D. Crystal advices in this case to relate the neatness of their analytical categories to the fuzziness of the real world [9, p. 157].

English researchers B. Nerlich and D. Clark distinguish two main approaches to meaning. The first is traditional field semantics which seems to be favoured by some cognitive semanticists analyzing quasi-universal conceptual and semantic structure. The second is modern frame semantics as represented by Fillmore school of frame semantics. In 1975 C. Fillmore defined frames as 'any system of linguistic choices… which can get associated with prototypical instances of scenes' and called the semantic or lexical field the *frame* [13, p. 124 – 143]. The importance of conceptual understanding was also emphasised by C. Fillmore. He noticed that to understand a word one not only has to be conscious of its lexical "neighbours" in the field, but also has to know something about its "conceptual underpinning" [10, p. 228]. The English scholars also point at the intermediate approach which is taken by L. Barsalon who in 1992 proposed a hierarchical model of local frames as part of more complex and more global frames [13, p. 126 – 138].

S. Öhman speaks rather about *linguistic field* than *semantic field.* The Swedish linguist stresses that the issue depends on the character of each particular semantic problem. She discusses and summarises three theories of linguistic field: 1) the original Ipsen field which was influenced by the "Wörter und Sachen" movement, made explicit his methodological principle of lexical research but did not succeed in creating a field concept which could be applied in more than very rare cases; 2) Porzing's "inclusive" field concept which served as a framework for describing certain events in the development of the inner form of a language and thus increased the possibility of understanding certain complicated evolutional processes of language and thought; 3) Trier's field concept which is the most promising of all and provides new and profitable criteria for research; it is difficult to evaluate the usefulness of his theory as he fulfilled to complete the investigation of the field in German only from the beginning of the 13th century up to the present [14, p. 124-134]. She points at the great number of field theories and indicates that each may contribute something to the solution. Hovever, semantic research must be proceeded in numerous directions and can propose new methods [14, p. 134].

Ukrainian linguist U. Potiatynyk compiles the list of terms that are alternatively used for semantic field – lexical field, lexical set, and semantic domain. She consideres a lexical field to be a group of words or lexemes whose members are related by meaning, reference, or use. She names three conditions which should be met to define a lexical field: 1) the lexemes should be of the same class; 2) their meanings have something in common; 3) they are interrelated by precisely definable meaning relations [15, p. 108 – 109]. Thus the meaning of lexemes and the relations between them are of great importance for the systematization of lexicon.

The theory of semantic field has been researched by such Ukrainian scholars as F. Bacevych, Y. Karpenko, T. Kosmeda, O. Tatarenko, S. Shabi and others. For example, S. Shabi defines semantic field as a paradigmatic unity of lexical units of a certain part of speech sharing at least one common semantic component [7, p. 52 – 57].

However, the boundaries between semantic fields are not clear-cut and scholars come across many difficulties in referring lexemes to a certain semantic field. A. Smirnitskyi claims that there are difficulties in classifying words from different lexical semantic domains. According to him sometimes it is almost impossible to find the boundaries between certain thematic classes (he also names them semantic fields), as some words have more than one meaning which causes their belonging to different semantic fields, some words have vague meaning and can be referred to a few word-groups [4, p. 174-176]. The author clearly distinguishes between contextual and logical groups, however sometimes the differences are vague. In his opinion contextual groups are composed of words (meanings) which co-occur in the context. Logical groups consist of words of more general character and are of the same parts of speech [4, p. 176 – 177].

Many Ukrainian and Russian scholars use the term lexical semantic group to denote the notion of semantic field (M. Pokrovskyy, A. Ufimceva, M. Burkhanov, O. Seliverstova, H. Mizzerina, F. Fillin and others).

F. Filin in his article 'About lexical and semantic word groups' proves that the lexicon is divided into lexical-and-semantic word groups which form lexical and semantic language system. Classification of lexicon into lexical-and-semantic groups can be done for different purposes [5, p. 350]. He also distinguishes the content of such notions as lexical and semantic group and thematic group. He points out that there are small lexical and semantic word groups within one thematic group [6, p 315]. The common thing between the two mentioned groups is the fact that both of them reflect cognized objective reality. This means that any lexical-and-semantic group has its *theme* [5, p. 336]. The scientist also stresses that two common types of semantic relation in the structure of lexical and semantic group are based on synonymy and antonymy [6]. His approach is followed by I. Burkhanov. According to him a lexical semantic group is an objectively existing subdivision of vocabulary structure [1]. Thus, words which belong to the same part of speech and express the same concept are termed as a lexical and semantic group.

The same point of view shares L. Kobets who says that it is essential to distinguish lexical semantic group and thematic group in the relations between lexical units. The author claims that lexical semantic group is defined based on the relations between lexemes of the same part of speech, when thematic groups is formed based on common gender characteristic [2, p. 131-132].

There are some difficulties in defining semantic field and scientists have different approaches to the notion. Based on the recent studies we have defined **a semantic field as a set of words that belong together under the same conceptual meaning, are characterized by certain relations between the lexemes and belong to the same part of speech.**

Objective. The main goal of this article is to conduct systemic analysis of the vocabulary of English Last Wills and Testaments written between 1837 and 2000. The starting point of the analysis is the arrangement of the bulk of verbs and nouns used in the texts, making up the corpus of research, into semantic fields.

Materials and methods. The corpus of research contains 100 English Last Wills and Testaments written be-

tween 1837 and 2000. The structural method was used which allowed to describe in details the *semantic fields* and to construct sets of word groups which occur in the materials of the research. First we defined the notion of *semantic field* and then singled out seven semantic fields in the material of our research. We also analyzed the relations between the words in each field. An online Oxford Learner's Dictionary was used to explain the meaning of semantically related words.

Results and their discussion. Various approaches to the notion of semantic field presented above allow us to define it as a set of words that belong together under the same conceptual meaning, are characterized by certain relations between the lexemes and belong to the same part of speech. Based on the analysis of semantic field theory and the definition we singled out seven notional semantic fields in the English Last Wills and Testaments under study: 1) process/circumstances of testament; 2) testator and heir; 3) object of testament; 4) death and funeral; 5) execution/witnessing of testament; 6) date of testament; 7) geographical names.

Let us analyze each group in details.

The first field is presented by verbs of processing a testament and is expressed by set of verbs: *give (*to offer something to someone, or to provide someone with something*), device (*to invent a plan, system, object, etc., usually using your intelligence or imagination*), bequeath (*to arrange for money or property to be given to somebody after your death*), order* (to give a command to a person to do something, to arrange, regulate or dispose*), direct* (to aim something at a particular person or thing; to control or organize how a person or group of people does something*), leave* (to give something to someone before you go away*), dispose* (to make someone feel a particular way towards someone or something; +of to get rid of something or deal with something so that the matter is finished*), will* (to make something happen by wishing for it very strongly; to formally give someone something after you die by stating it in a will*), advance* (to give or lend someone money before the usual time or before they do something*), declare* (to announce officially that something is true or happening*). All these verbs denote one notion but carry different shades of meaning.

The second field testator/heir is formed by words denoting relationship between them. Here we can figure out four subfields: 1) *children – parents – grandchildren; 2) daughter – son – brother – sister – nephew – niece – aunt – uncle – cousin – granddaughter – grandnephew; 3) husband – wife*. The first set is hierarchically ordered. The second set shows kinship relationship and the last indicates marriage.

Antonymic relationship has been found in English Last Wills and Testaments and is presented by lexemes *heir* and *descendant*.

To the third field belong words which are the objects of bequeathing in Last Wills and Testaments. This field consists of two groups of nouns which differ in the relations between each group of lexemes. First, we singled out seven subfields belonging to this category: 1) household goods (*cup, jar, coffee pot, spoon, plate, jug, forks, can, basket, sugar tong*); 2) furniture (*drawers, desk, bookcase, bed, table, wardrobe, box, bed*); 3) wearing apparel or accessories (*broch, tortoise shell, ring*); 5) buildings (*house, cottage, dwelling house*); 6) farm animals (*cattle, horses, swine, pins, cows*); 7) books (*Book, Bible, Prayer book*). Within each of these fields we noticed the semantic relationship of inclusion. Hyponymy shows hierarchical relations between the generic and the individual term. Each set has a hyperonym which serves

to describe the group and hyponyms, i.e. subordinate terms of narrower or more specific meanings.

Secondly, this field also includes: 1) estate property: *premises* (the building and land near to it that a business owns or uses), *estate* (a large area of land, usually in the country, that is owned by one person or family), *property* (a thing or things that are owned by somebody; a possession or possessions), *land* (the area of ground that somebody owns, especially when you think of it as property that can be bought or sold) *and residue* (the part of the money, property of a person who has died that remains after all the debts have been paid); 2) land: *land* (ground or soil used as a basis for agriculture), *field* (an area of open land, especially one planted with crops or pasture, typically bounded by hedges or fences), *meadow* (a piece of grassland especially one used for hay). The words display the relations of synonymy;

The fourth field in the texts of English Wills and Testaments is made up by words denoting death and funeral. They include: *funeral* (a ceremony, usually a religious one, for burying or cremating a dead person), *decease* (the death of a person), *death* (the fact of somebody dying or being killed), *widow* (a woman whose husband has died and who has not married again), *demise* (death), *mourning* (sadness that you show and feel because somebody has died). At the same time *death* (the end of life), *decease* (a person's death), *and demise* (the death of a person, usually the end of someone who was previously considered to be powerful) make a semantic field and are the set of synonyms.

The fifth field which contains words referring to last execution/witnessing of testament is presented by three subfields: 1) words which express the concept of appointing an executor or executrix: *nominate* (to officially suggest that someone should be given a job, or that someone should receive a prize), *constitute* (to be or be considered as something), *appoint* (to choose someone to do a particular job or have a particular position*), empower* (to give a person the legal authority to do something); 2) words which express the revocation of a testament: *revoke* (to say officially that an agreement, permission, a law is no longer in effect*), void* (make not valid); 3) words which express witnessing: *subscribe* (sign a will, contract or other document; express or feel agreement with an idea or proposal*), set sb's hand (to sign) , sign sb's name; sign, acknowledge* (recognize the fact or importance). These fields are based on synonymy.

The sixth field which is found in English Last Wills and Testaments is date: days of the week and months of the year. The words in these fields are arranged as a cycle.

The seventh field includes geographical names which occur in English Last Wills and Testaments. For example: the County of Chester, England, Woodside Farm Cranage, White Hall Farm Wheelock, Sandbach, London, Middlewich, Congleton, Oxford road, Dukinfield, Cuddington, Little Peover, Hartford Hill, Ledsmere Hall, Widens, the County of Salop etc. The information provides us with names of countries, provinces, towns, areas and streets. It also contains information about physical and cultural geographic features in England, both current (for that time) and historical.

Conclusions. The research has shown that there are some difficulties in defining semantic field and in classifying lexemes into it. In order to classify lexemes in the English Last Wills and Testaments we have chosen a traditional approach to semantic field. Thus, a semantic field is defined as a set of words that belong together under the same conceptual meaning, are characterized by certain relations between the lexemes and belong to the same part of speech. Based on these three features we

have constructed seven semantic fields which occur in English Last Wills and Testaments: 1) process/circumstances of testament; 2) testator and heir; 3) object of testament; 4) death and funeral; 5) execution/witnessing of testament. 6) date of testament; 7) geographical names. The relations between the lexemes in each field are mainly based on synonymy and hyponymy. Some subfields are defined by relations of antonyms, or arranged in a cycle. We have to indicate that singled out semantic fields of words are common for the genre of Last Wills and Testaments. The further research should be done to investigate the semantic fields of adjectives.

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Английские завещания: системное описание лексики жанра
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Аннотация. В статье представлено системное описание классификации слов в английских завещаниях. Материал исследования составляют 100 английских завещаний, написанных в 1837–2000 годах. Описательный метод основан на понятии семантического поля. Учитывая традиционное определение семантического поля как группы слов, которые обладают одним концептуальным значением, характеризируются определенными отношениями между лексическими единицами и принадлежат к одной части речи, автор выделила семь семантических полей в английских завещаниях: 1) процесс/обстоятельства завещания; 2) завещатель/получатель; 3) предмет завещания; 4) смерть/похорон; 5) исполнение/засвидетельствование завещания; 6) дата завещания; 7) географические названия. Доказано, что каждая группа лексических единиц создана, в основном, с учетом синонимических и гипонимических отношений. Некоторые подгруппы определены за отношениями антонимии или составлены в цикл.
Ключевые слова: семантическое поле, синонимия, гипонимия, антонимия, завещание.