Ludmila Pöppel (Stockholm)

**Delimitation of synonyms within the semantic field **POWER**: смута (turmoil), беспорядки (disorders), волнения (tumult)**

**Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate distinctive semantic features and distinguishing combinatorial properties of the three near-synonyms belonging to the semantic field POWER – смута (turmoil), беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult). The starting point is the constructive peculiarities of these near-synonyms as investigated from extensive corpus data – the Russian National Corpus (RNC) and Google Books (GB). I will demonstrate what combinatorial properties were discovered, and show how combinatorics allows us to identify both semantic distinctions among near-synonyms and differences in conceptual categorization.

1. Preliminary Remarks

The delimitation of synonyms is among the most productive and topical areas of contemporary lexical semantics. Synonymy has been investigated from different theoretical perspectives and with the help of various tools at the disposal of present-day linguistics. Synonyms can differ according to various parameters, including distinctive semantic features and distinguishing combinatorial properties. Combinatorial differences are often connected with semantic features, so that a study of the combinatorial profile of a given word based on text corpora can help identify differences that are not intuitively apparent.

Synonyms can also differ conceptually. This is important from a cognitive point of view. For example, lexical units that are near in meaning can be construed to represent different categories of conceptual taxonomy such as activity, action, event, process, and state. In a number of cases in which words may appear to be synonyms, however, they are based on different conceptual structures. Conceptual structures are also a part of semantics, of course, yet semantics of a higher order. For that reason, I will call this level conceptual.

The present paper will examine synonyms and their combinations in all of these respects. The starting point will be combinatorics; that is, the constructive peculiarities of near-synonyms as investigated on the basis of extensive corpus data (cf. also Divjak/Gries 2006, Janda/Solovyev 2009). I also consider previous research of the near-synonyms революция (revolution), переворот (coup), восстание (uprising), мятеж (riot) (Dobrovol’skij/Pöppel 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b). These constructive properties can arise from semantic differences, thereby making it possible to identify the conceptual structures underlying their semantics. In order to distinguish synonyms, it is not enough to determine combinatorial differences in the literal sense. It is also important to discover co-occurrences in the figurative sense. This makes it possible to determine the semantic potential contained in the direct meaning of near-
synonyms and thereby discover other differences as well. Using the example of the near-synonyms смута (turmoil), беспорядки (disorders), волнения (tumult), the goal of the study is to show how combinatorics allows us to identify both semantic distinctions among near-synonyms and differences in conceptual categorization. On the basis of the Russian National Corpus (RNC) and Google Books (GB), I will demonstrate how combinatorial properties were discovered and how the analysis of these materials revealed a number of combinatorial preferences.

The present study does not consider corresponding events in the real world. It is quite evident that one and the same event can be called смута (turmoil), беспорядки (disorders), волнения (tumult), or even революция (revolution), бунт (mutiny), мятеж (riot), восстание (uprising). From a linguistic perspective what is interesting to study is not what distinguishes actual events or what a real event should be like in order to be called смута (turmoil), беспорядки (disorders) or волнения (tumult). What is important is to determine what features the speaker wants to focus on through the use of one or another word; that is, which features of each word are being profiled. The present study is dedicated to the study of such features.

**Hypothesis**

When a speaker chooses one of the words belonging to the same semantic field, he or she conceptualizes one and the same event in different ways. Combinatorial properties and syntactic preferences reflect conceptual structures. If we can discover differences in the combinatorial behavior of the words, this means that their underlying concepts are different.

The purpose, therefore, is to find differences of this type – differences both in contextual behavior and in the underlying conceptual specifics.

**Method**

The analysis of contextual behavior of the near-synonyms смута (turmoil), беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult), i.e. syntactic preferences and lexical co-occurrences.

**Data**

Corpus data from the Russian National Corpus (RNC) and Google Books (GB).\(^1\)

2. **Syntactic behavior**

The majority of contexts in the RNC indicate that смута (turmoil) occupies the position of a semantic subject in the utterance. In many cases, the semantic subject occupies the position of a syntactic subject as well. Cf. (1) and (2).

---

\(^1\) In GB it was possible to search combinational preferences only at one word intervals, regardless of the multiple meanings of the words.
Delimitation of synonyms within the semantic field POWER

(1) В годном 1024 году в суздальской земле вспыхнула смута, предводителями которой стали языческие жрецы. [Ирина Грачёва. Суздальские тайны // «Наука и жизнь», 2009]

In the lands of Suzdal in the year of famine in 1027, turmoil erupted, led by the pagan priests.2


Absolutely, but the turmoil passes and an even more united society is taking shape; one example is the Soviet people.

Of the three near-synonyms considered here, смута (turmoil) is the only one which can be used both in the singular (cf. (1) and (2) and the plural, cf. (3)).

(3) Во многом смуты проистекают от пришлых, из разных соображений вступивших в казачьи организации. [ВБКВ сегодня (2001) // «Жизнь национальностей», 2001.11.23]

To a great extent turmoils are caused by newcomers who, for various reasons, have joined the Cossack organizations.

In the position of a subject it occurs mostly in the singular (RNC, present-day usage: 34 hits in singular, 9 in plural). The plural occurs mainly in oblique cases, especially in the attributive position, cf. уроки смут (lessons of turmoil). Смута (turmoil) seldom occupies the position of an object; such contexts are untypical. Cf. (4).


Astara is a city of hangings, understand? Translated from Farsi it means a gallows. There on one occasion the Shah hanged all the rebels. Everyone who stirred up turmoil – he strung up half the city.

This is an obvious counterexample because учинить (stir up) means not only the initiation of an activity but also thorough control of its every step. Co-occurrence with учинить (stir up) occurs mostly in contexts from the 19th and early 20th centuries (RNC: 2 examples in present-day contexts), which indicates that the word underwent diachronic changes during the last hundred years. The study of diachronic changes would demand a separate study; within the present study it is apparent that in present-day contexts the word occurs much more frequently as a subject than as an object, especially in the singular.

Беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult) occur mostly in the position of an object. Cf. (5) and (6).

2 Here and in similar examples the English translation is included for the sake of understanding. Translations of Russian examples by Charles Rougle.
General Khabalov tasked him with crushing the disorders.

They went on silently for a while, and then the general asked: “And you, Evgenii Natanoovich, have you ever put down peasant disorders?” “Never had to. But I do have any idea about what class war in the countryside is like.”

This indicates that смута (turmoil) is construed basically as an event which is not caused by something else but occurs on its own. It is perceived as self-generating, whereas беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult) are perceived as activities or states that are often caused by something else.

3. Lexical co-occurrences

Lexical preferences are motivated both by the typical syntactic position and the conceptual properties of the word. Common to смута (turmoil), беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult) is co-occurrence with the verb начинаться (begin). Cf. (7) and (8).

(7) Началась смута. Паны вооружали челядь и мужиков, разбивали друг у друга хутора, жгли местечки. [А.Н. Толстой. Петр Первый (2013)]

The turmoil began. The Polish landowners armed their servants and peasants and smashed each other’s villages and burned the small towns.

(8) Вновь начались волнения, демонстратры остановили движение на мосту через Обь и подожгли входные двери в квартирах трех депутатов городской думы, которые считались людьми «ЮКОСа». [Б.А. Березовский. Человек, програвший войну (2013)]

Again the tumult began. Demonstrators stopped traffic on the bridge over the Ob and set fire to the entrance doors in the apartments of three city Duma deputies who were thought to be Yukos people.

Other typical co-occurrences for смута (turmoil) are the verbs произойти (come about) (RNC 11, GB 601), родиться (be born) (RNC 3, GB 55), возникать (arise) (RNC 14, GB 402). Cf. (9), (10) and (11).

(9) Ведь император совсем не был уверен в том, что в действительноности «Россию вздрнул на дыбы», а смута рождалась каждый раз, стоило ему удалиться за пределы отчизны […]. [100 дней с Наполеоном // «Мир & Дом. City», 2003.09.15]

The Emperor, of course, was not at all sure that in reality he had “made Russia rear up,” but turmoil was born each time he withdrew from the borders of the Fatherland […].

(10) Любопытно, что по поводу волнений 1860 года Милютин не разделял мнение генерала Н. И. Евдокимова о том, что смута произошла «только от какого-нибудь внешнего подстрекательства» […]. [Александр Мелихов. Не хватает только сказок
It’s interesting that with regard to the tumult of 1860, Miliutin did not share General N.I. Evdokimov’s view that the turmoil came about “solely as the result of external instigation” [...].

Что касается моего мнения, товарищ маркиз, то мне кажется, что от этих преемников и возникает на русской земле смута. [Сергей Есин. Маркиз Астольф де Кюстин. Почта духов, или Россия в 2007 году. Переложение на отечественный Сергей Есина (2008)]

As for my opinion, Comrade Marquis, it seems to me that it is from these successors that turmoil arises in the Russian land.

Typical co-occurrences as well as the word’s position as the subject in an utterance provide evidence that смута (turmoil) is not perceived as a social event caused by people but is rather self-induced. Also, смута (turmoil) can combine only with the verbs инициировать (initiate), вызвать (incite), затевать (start, launch), and thus occupy the position of an object, but such co-occurrences are not typical. Cf. (12) and (13).

(12) А предложение Строганова выставить в церкви чудотворную икону с надписями, порицающими действия правительства, не имело целью вызвать народную смуту. [Александр Архангельский. Александр I (2000)]

But Stroganov’s suggestion to exhibit the wonder-working icon with captions condemning the actions of the government was not intended to incite popular turmoil.

(13) Как всегда, наши “старые и добрые друзья”, являясь инициаторами и больших, и малых смут в России (реформа и смута – почти равнозначные понятия), сколачивали на этом только громадные состояния. [Еще раз об аренде лесов в России // «Лесное хозяйство», 2003]

As always, our “good old friends,” who are the instigators of major and minor turmoil in Russia (reform and turmoil are almost equivalent notions), took advantage of the situation to scrape together enormous fortunes.

Беспорядки (disorders), as well as смута (turmoil), combines with the verb учинить (stir up) (14 hits in RNC, 235 hits in GB). Cf. (14).

(14) Ведь наци-либерасты – отличная «пехота» для того, чтобы учинить бунты и беспорядки. [Максим Калашников, Евгений Осинцев. Завтра была война. 22 декабря 201 […] года. Ахиллесова пята России (2013)]

Our Nazi liberasts, after all, are excellent “ground troops” for causing revolts and disorders.

Besides, беспорядки (disorders) collates with the verbs подавлять (suppress) (79 hits in RNC, 857 in GB), прекратить (end) (13 hits in RNC, 1671 in GB), остановить (stop) (6 hits in RNC, 142 in GB), провоцировать (provoke) (3 hits in RNC, 1200 in GB), учинить (stir up) (14 hits in RNC, 315 in GB), предотвратить (prevent) (RNC 22 hits, 418 hits in GB). Cf. (15), (16) and (17).

(15) И действительно – в городе перекрыто движение, милиция на посту, армия готова подавить беспорядки, спецслужбы бдят, Агентство самоочищается. [Олег Дивов. Выбраковка (1999)]
And indeed, traffic in the city has been shut down, the militia is ready, the army is prepared to crush disorders, special forces are keeping watch, the Agency is purging itself.

It was necessary to prevent further disorders, reinforce the protection of important objectives.

(17) Сторонникам Корнилова оказалось небезопасно не только провоцировать беспорядки, но высказываться в его пользу. [Алексей Щербаков. Гражданская война. Генеральная репетиция демократии (2011)]
It turned out that it was unsafe for Kornilov’s supporters not only to provoke disorders, but also to speak out in favor of them.

Волнения (tumult) collates with подавлять (suppress) (28 hits in RNC, 1050 in GB), прекратить (end) (17 hits in RNC, 535 in GB), провоцировать (provoke) (RNC 2 hits, GB 335), предотвратить (prevent) (RNC 0, GB 263). Cf. (18).

(18) Мехоношин с Чугуновым выслали на митинг комиссаров-чекистов, требуя немедленно разойтись, прекратить волнения и встать за станки. [Р. Б. Гуль. Дзержинский (Начало террора) (1974)]
Mekhonoshin and Chugunov sent commissars of the Cheka to the mass meeting, demanding that everyone immediately disperse, stop the tumult, and man their machines.

Specific to волнения (tumult) is that it does not combine with the verb учинить (stir up) (no hits in RNC, 1 hit in GB) and seldom with остановить (stop) (no hits in RNC, 29 hits in GB). Cf. (19).

(19) Ричард находил, что молодой Флетчер удивительно своевременно учинил волнения на границе. [Симона Вилар. Замок на скале (2014)]
Richard found that young Fletcher had caused the tumult on the border in a surprisingly timely fashion.

Another difference between беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult) is the frequency of co-occurrences with the adjective стихийный (elemental) and the noun зачинщик (instigator). Беспорядки (disorders) combines seldom with стихийный (elemental) (RNC 0, GB 250) and often with зачинщик (instigator) (RNC 14, GB 2475). Волнения (tumult), on the contrary, combines often with стихийный (elemental) (RNC 2, GB 1454) and seldom with зачинщик (instigator) (RNC 2, GB 472). This is an indication that the focus in the word волнения (tumult) is not on the instigator of the tumult or on the force stopping it, it is rather perceived as an elemental force, while the word беспорядки (disorders) is perceived as a more organized activity that can be easier stopped and suppressed.

In the position of an attribute, смута (turmoil), беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult) co-occur with the words эпоха (epoch), период (period), and годы (years). Cf. (20) and (21).
Delimitation of synonyms within the semantic field POWER

(20) И он заключал, что Россия вышла, наконец, из эпохи волнений и смут. [В.А. Маклаков. Из воспоминаний (1954)]

And he concluded that Russia had finally emerged from the era of tumult and turmoil.

(21) Начинаются годы смут, революций, гражданских войн, и они могут длиться долго [...]. [Владимир Шаров. Воскрешение Лазаря (1997-2002)]

The years of turmoil, revolutions, and civil wars are beginning, and they may last for a long time [...].

A search in the RNC and GB has shown differences in the frequency of co-occurrences. Смута (turmoil) combines often with these words while беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult) do so only in isolated cases. Cf. table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>эпоха (epoch)</th>
<th>годы (years)</th>
<th>период (period)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RNC</td>
<td>GB</td>
<td>RNC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>смута (turmoil)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>934</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>беспорядки (disorders)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>волнения (tumult)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This suggests that смута (turmoil) is construed to be a particular and possibly long-lasting state of society. Смута (turmoil) occurs in idioms, the most common being посеять смуту (sow turmoil). It also collates with idioms such as поднять голову (rear its head) and набирать обороты (gain momentum). Cf. (22) and (23).


It was not so much that turmoil had reared its head, it was not so much that the enemies of the regime in power had become bold to the point of audacity and were uncommonly well entrenched.

(23) Однако, несмотря на все старания, слухи о втором чудесном спасении Дмитрия стали гулять по России. Новая смута в стране набирала обороты. К лету 1606 года Василию Шуйскому удалось, опираясь на знатных бояр, укрепить свою власть в Москве. [Т. Дорошенко. Преодоление «великой разрухи» русского государства. Ополчение 1611 и 1612 годов // «Наука и жизнь», 2006]

Despite all efforts, however, rumors of the second miraculous rescue of Dmitrii began circulating throughout Russia. New turmoil gained momentum in the country. By the summer of 1606, Vasilii Shuiskii managed with the support of influential boyars to strengthen his power in Moscow.

Co-occurrences with the idioms поднять голову (rear its head) and набирать обороты (gain momentum) as well as the verb рождаться (be born) (cf. (9)) point to the fact that смута (turmoil) can be personified. Neither беспорядки (disorders) nor волнения (tumult) can be personified; in (9), (22) and (23) смута (turmoil) cannot be replaced by беспорядки (disorders) or волнения (tumult). There is a clear dis-
tinction in usage in the singular and plural. When personified or used metaphorically it can only occur in the singular. The plural form is used when referring to concrete or possible events.

Беспорядки (disorders) can combine with the adjective форменный (regular) which was a free co-occurrence 100 years ago. Форменный (regular) meant ‘самый настоящий, действительный’ (very real, genuine) (coll.) (Ušakov 1935–1940). In present-day Russian форменный (regular) is not used in this meaning, which is why форменные беспорядки (regular disorders), as well as форменный дурак (regular fool) or форменная истеричка (regular hysterical woman) are perceived as collocations.

Etymologically, смута (turmoil) can be traced back to the verb мутить (muddle) (Dal’ 1978, Vasmer 2004). It is therefore perceived as something muddy. Cf. also the idiom ловить рыбу в мутной воде (to fish in troubled waters) which means ‘to involve oneself in difficult, confusing, or dangerous situations, especially in view of gaining an advantage’. Typical co-occurrences indicate that смута (turmoil) has no boundary or concrete source that generates it and that it cannot be controlled. It is perceived as a natural or supernatural force. Cf. (24), (25) and (26).

As for the Bolsheviks – well, they were just a kind of group, a gang, if you will, that proved to be the best united and least moral at the moment the regime collapsed, and if it hadn’t been the Bolsheviks another force would have appeared that would have been just as immoral. In times of turmoil evil always rises to the surface […].

(25) Только Горбачев маскируется, осторожничает, балансируя на краю пропасти, ищет сомнительные обходные пути, а Ельцин в духе возрожденной им авантюрной традиции российской буржуазии начала XX века ломит напролом, увлекая за собой в пучину бедствий и смут трехсотмиллионный народ. [Нина Андреева. Остановить развал советской державы // «Огонек». № 11, 1991, 1991]
Only Gorbachev disguises himself, moves cautiously as he balances on the edge of the precipice, looks for questionable bypasses, whereas Eltsyn, in the spirit of the adventurous early twentieth-century bourgeois tradition he has revived, charges straight ahead, dragging the nation of three hundred million with him into the abyss of calamities and turmoil.

(26) И неизменно страна выходила из смут, высвобождалась от наваждений. [Выдюжим! (2000) // «Жизнь национальностей», 2000.06.23]
And invariably the country would emerge from the turmoil as it rid itself of its delusions.

This leads us to the next question. Смута (turmoil) occurs also in the idiom сеять смуть (sow turmoil). Cf. (27).

(27) Бёрли дает резкую отповедь этим проискам, а также американцам – «сеятелям смуты, путаникам, развзяным элементам и лжецам чистой марки», – которые портят отношение с СССР. [В. В. Вишневский. Дневники военных лет (1943–1945)]
Burleigh sharply disapproved both of these intrigues and of the Americans – “the sowers of turmoil, middle-headed, impertinent elements, liars of the worst type” – who are ruining relations with the USSR.

This looks like a counterexample. How is a natural force connected with сеять (sow) which is primarily associated with sowing seeds? We can find an explanation if we consider the well-known proverb: Кто сеет ветер, тот пожнет бурю. / (He who sows the wind, reaps (shall reap) whirlwind (Br.). / Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind (Am.)). It refers to The Old Testament: “Так как они сеяли ветер, то и пожнут бурю […]” (Книга пророка Осии, гл. 8, ст. 7) / “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind […]” (Book of Hosea, 8:7). Spreading seeds with a natural force such as wind does not contradict the perception of смута (turmoil) as force.

4. Conclusions

Hypotheses on the conceptual-semantic differences between смута (turmoil), беспорядки (disorders), and волнения (tumult) have been inferred from their syntactic positions and combinatorial distinctions. The results have shown that смута (turmoil) is construed as representing a category of conceptual taxonomy that differs from беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult). Смута (turmoil) – in contrast to беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult), is more frequently a syntactic subject than it is an object. What is important here is that underlying these seemingly superficial differences there are conceptual peculiarities and therefore deep semantic distinctions. Смута (turmoil) is conceptualized as a kind of self-generating state that is not subject to regulation or control, an elemental force or disaster like a thunderstorm, inclement weather, drought, floods, etc. Here the inner form further characterizes this force. Смута (turmoil) is murky, i.e. dark and protracted rather than bright and instantaneous like thunder and lightning. Смута (turmoil) is often personified, and the familiar Old Testament saying “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind […]” has led to the formation of the collocation пожнет смуту (shall reap the turmoil). This additional association with a storm, i.e. a dark and murky natural force, is hostile to humans. The analysis has also shown that беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult) are conceptualized mostly as an activity or state caused by something else rather than being self-generated. Although беспорядки (disorders) and волнения (tumult) have similar conceptual structures, they display some differences in combinatorial preferences. Беспорядки (disorders) is rather an activity that has initiators, i.e is organized, while волнения (tumult) is often perceived as an elemental force. Unlike смута (turmoil), волнения (tumult) is rather seething, bubbling or choppy as a sea or an ocean. If we consider such parameters as self-generating, not subject to regulation or control on the one hand, and an organized activity on the other, we can make a hierarchal scale in which смута (turmoil) and беспорядки
(disorders) could be placed on opposite poles, while волнения (tumult) could be placed in between them.

It should be pointed out that the examples above demonstrate usage in the majority of contexts. In any corpus-based study we can also find counterexamples. The purpose of such studies is to discover tendencies, which are supported by the majority of examples.

References


Dobrovolskij, Dmitrij; Pöppel, Ludmila (2012a): Lexical semantics and official propaganda: революция (revolution), переворот (takeover of power), восстание (uprising). In: *Die Welt der Slaven* 17, 1, 134–145.


