

## ON THE ETYMOLOGY AND DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPTS "TAUTOLOGY" AND "PLEONASM" IN LINGUISTICS

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### Abstract

This article discusses the etymology and definitions of the concepts "tautology" and "pleonasm", widely used in linguistics and rhetoric. The historical roots of the terms, their development in the context of philological thought, as well as differences and similarities in modern linguistic usage are analyzed. Special attention is paid to the relationship between these concepts, their functional load and their role in the structure of the utterance. The purpose of the study is to deepen the understanding of the terms, which will allow for a more accurate interpretation of speech phenomena and avoid their stylistic errors.

**Keywords:** Tautology, pleonasm, etymology, definition, linguistics, rhetoric, redundancy, speech error.

### Introduction

Language as a dynamic system is subject not only to changes, but also to internal reflection — the analysis of its structures, functions and deviations. One of the manifestations of speech redundancy is tautology and pleonasm, which are often perceived as synonymous phenomena, but in fact represent different types of linguistic constructions. Understanding the essence of these concepts is important for both theoretical linguistics and practical stylistics.

The relevance of the topic is due to the widespread use of tautological and pleonastic constructions in everyday speech, journalism, and even scientific texts, where they can reduce the expressiveness of an utterance or distort the meaning. Despite the similarity of the concepts, the difference between them requires a clearer definition and differentiation.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the origin and semantic features of the terms "tautology" and "pleonasm", as well as to identify their functional and structural differences in language. To achieve this goal, the following tasks are expected to be solved::

1. To study the etymological roots of concepts;
2. Analyze definitions of terms in various linguistic sources;
3. Compare tautology and pleonasm according to a number of criteria;
4. Evaluate the speech function of each phenomenon.

The research methodology includes comparative historical analysis, lexicographic method and elements of contextual analysis.



## 1. Etymology of the concept of "tautology"

The term "tautology" (from other Greek. ταυτολογία) goes back to the ancient Greek expressions "ταυτό" (the same) and "λέγειν" (to speak), which literally means "to say the same thing." Initially, tautology was interpreted as excessive repetition, devoid of semantic load.

In ancient philosophy, tautology is found, in particular, in Aristotle, who in the Organon uses this term to characterize logically incorrect or tautological statements. Thus, the statement "A man is a man" was perceived as an example of a logical tautology — a statement that does not carry new information.

Medieval scholasticism inherited and developed the ancient understanding of the term, applying it in logical and philosophical reasoning. However, with the development of rhetoric and stylistics, tautology acquired a broader connotation: as a verbal repetition expressing the poverty of thought or the inability to vary expressions.

In modern linguistics, especially in works on stylistics and textual criticism, the term began to be used primarily to denote excessive repetition of the same meaning using words that are lexically identical or similar in meaning.:

- "Climb up",
- "Snowy Snow",
- "He died a dead death."

At the same time, in logic, tautology means a universally true statement (for example, "If it rains, it rains"), and in this context the term retains a neutral or even positive connotation. Thus, the etymological meaning of the term initially indicates repetition, which determines its semantic core.

## 2. Etymology of the concept of "pleonasm"

The term "pleonasm" goes back to the ancient Greek word πλεονασμός (pleonasmos), which is formed from the verb πλεονάζω — "to exaggerate", "to be excessive" and the noun πλεον — "more", "excess". The etymological core itself indicates redundancy, excess of the necessary, which reflects the basic semantics of the term in linguistics.

In ancient grammar and rhetoric, pleonasm was viewed as a device of verbal abundance, often perceived as a rhetorical figure that allows you to emphasize the emotionality or expressiveness of the utterance. Thus, in the poetic and solemn speech of antiquity, pleonastic expressions were considered acceptable and even appropriate, especially in the oral tradition.

In Latin rhetoric, the term "pleonasm" was also used in a similar sense. For example, in Cicero one can find constructions containing redundant elements serving the purposes of expressiveness. However, within the framework of the emerging grammatical norm, especially in the post—classical period, pleonasm begins to be perceived primarily as a deviation from the norm — as an "extra" word or phrase that does not enrich the meaning.

In early Modern European philology, pleonasm is increasingly interpreted as a speech error. In grammars and stylistics of the XVII–XIX centuries, it is defined as unnecessary repetition of content using elements that are different in form, but identical or similar in meaning. For example:

- "butter oil",
- "the main point",



- "Pre-planning".

In the Russian language, the word "pleonasm" was fixed in the 19th century, mainly through translated sources and scientific works. Initially, the term was used in descriptive grammar and rhetoric, and later became part of stylistic terms. Most Russian philologists of the early 20th century attributed pleonasm to linguistic errors that violate the principle of saving linguistic resources.

However, already in the Soviet period, especially with the development of functional stylistics, the attitude towards pleonasm became more flexible. Some researchers have begun to recognize its possibility in certain contexts, for example, to enhance a semantic or emotional effect, clarify or complete a statement logically.

Thus, the etymology and historical development of the term "pleonasm" show that initially it did not have a strictly negative assessment, but with the formation of literary language norms it acquired stylistic labeling as a manifestation of redundancy requiring careful use.

### 3. Definitions of concepts in linguistics

Modern linguistics has a wide range of definitions of the terms "tautology" and "pleonasm", reflecting both traditional approaches and modern interpretations of these concepts in various linguistic contexts.

In explanatory and encyclopedic dictionaries of the Russian language, the term "tautology" is defined, as a rule, in two ways: on the one hand, as a logical statement that remains true for any value of the variables included in it (logical tautology); on the other, as a speech phenomenon expressed in the repetition of the same meaning[1].

Thus, in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language by S. I. Ozhegov, tautology is interpreted as "repetition of identical or homogeneous concepts" (for example, "dead death")[2]. In the Linguistic Encyclopedia edited by V. N. Yartseva, tautology is defined as "the repetition of the same word or unambiguous expressions within the same context, which makes the utterance redundant"[3].

In logic, tautology means a formula that is true for any values of variables. This definition is used, for example, in the framework of classical propositional logic, where tautology is an expression of the form: "If A, then A".

Thus, in linguistics, tautology is usually interpreted as lexico-semantic repetition, whereas in logic it is interpreted as formal semantic universality[4].

Pleonasm, as defined by Ozhegov, is "the excessive use of words containing a repetition of information already contained in the text"[5]. In the Dictionary of Linguistic Terms by O. S. Akhmanova, pleonasm is defined as "a means of speech redundancy in which the content of one word is partially or completely repeated by another word or expression"[6]. An example is the expression "climb up" — the direction is already implied in the verb "climb" itself.

Some authors, for example, Y. N. Karaulov and T. A. Ladyzhenskaya, emphasize that pleonasm can not only be a mistake, but also act as a functionally motivated means, especially in poetic or colloquial speech[7]. In this context, it is used to enhance expressiveness, rhythm, or emotional coloring.

On the other hand, in normative stylistics, pleonasm is most often interpreted as a violation of the principle of conciseness and linguistic economy.[8] It is considered one of the types of speech



redundancy that should be avoided in official, scientific and business communication.

Both categories — tautology and pleonasm — relate to the phenomena of redundancy, but they differ in the way it manifests itself.:

Category	Type of repetition	Example	Characteristic
Tautology	Repetition of the same word or meaning	"He was the one and only one"	Formal semantic redundancy
Pleonasm	Repetition of meaning in different words	"Go upstairs"	Semantic redundancy

Thus, definitions in linguistics point to a key difference: tautology is a literal or semantic repetition, whereas pleonasm is an excessive explanation of meaning.

#### 4. Comparative analysis of tautology and pleonasm

Despite the fact that the terms "tautology" and "pleonasm" are often perceived as synonyms, linguistic and stylistic analysis shows fundamental differences between them, both in terms of form and content. Comparing these concepts makes it possible to identify the fine lines between acceptable linguistic redundancy and stylistic error.

Tautology is most often expressed in the form of precise or almost exact lexical repetition. These can be either identical words or single-root words.:

- "It was a long and lengthy conversation.";
- "The essence lies in the very essence of the matter";
- "He said he said it himself."

Pleonasm, on the contrary, is formed by combining words that express the same meaning, but are not formally identical. It can manifest itself as:

- Duplication of information: "pre-planning",
- using clarifying words that do not carry additional information: "time period",
- excessive concretization: "I personally made it myself with my own hands."

Thus, tautology is a formal repetition, and pleonasm is a semantic duplication.

From the point of view of style, both phenomena can be perceived as speech errors, especially in scientific, official business and journalistic speech, where laconicism and accuracy are welcomed. However, in artistic and colloquial discourse, they can perform expressive, emotional, or rhythmic functions.

Examples from fiction:

Tautology:

"It was all because it was all he knew" (I. Bunin).

Pleonasm:

"He saw it with his own eyes" (F. Dostoevsky).

In these cases, the authors consciously use redundant constructions to enhance the drama, emphasize the character's inner feelings, or create an expressive rhythm.

It is important to keep in mind that redundancy may be due to the context and function of the utterance. In oral speech, pleonasms often serve the function of confirmation or reinforcement (for example, "absolutely exactly", "personally"), and tautologies may indicate uncertainty,



difficulty in formulating thoughts, or the emotional state of the speaker.

On the other hand, in logic, tautologies play the role of truth expressions that serve as the basis for constructing deductive reasoning. Pleonasm is not used in logic, because it contradicts the principle of strictness of formulations.

Some researchers (for example, V. V. Lopatin, L. P. Krysin) suggest classifying pleonasms and tautologies within the broader category of speech redundancy, dividing it into permissible (motivated) and erroneous (unmotivated).

In this context:

- Motivated tautology: "He became a real Real poet" (in poetry — for reinforcement);  
Motivated pleonasm: "I saw it with my own eyes" (for emotional emphasis);
- Unmotivated tautology: "A book about a book" without context;
- Unmotivated pleonasm: "He had a personal opinion of his own character."

Thus, the distinction between tautology and pleonasm requires consideration of the structural form, semantics, stylistic function and context of use.

### Conclusion

The analysis of the etymology and definitions of the concepts "tautology" and "pleonasm" allows us to draw a number of significant conclusions both in theoretical and applied aspects of linguistics. Both terms historically date back to the ancient Greek tradition and have undergone reinterpretation over time, adapting to the requirements of modern language theories and practices.

Tautology, as a rule, is a literal or semantically equivalent repetition that occurs in the context of a limited vocabulary or as a means of expression. Its specificity is most clearly manifested in logic, where it plays the role of universal truth, and in stylistics as either a mistake or a means of artistic expression.

Pleonasm, on the other hand, is characterized by a more flexible structure and can range from a speech error to a stylistically justified element, especially in colloquial and artistic speech. It manifests itself in the form of semantic redundancy, often hidden, and requires an analysis of the context and intentions of the speaker.

A comparative analysis has shown that, despite the general idea of tautology and pleonasm as synonyms, these concepts have clear differences at the level of form, meaning and functions. Their differentiation is especially important in the fields of editorial practice, language teaching, stylistic analysis and lexicography.

Thus, the study of the concepts of "tautology" and "pleonasm" contributes to a deeper understanding of the nature of linguistic redundancy and its role in the modern language system, as well as clarifies the conceptual framework of modern linguistics.

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