Introducing Basic Linguistic Concepts in English for Veterinary Medicine (EVM)

English vocabulary has a remarkable **range**, **flexibility** and **adaptability**. Thanks to the periods of contact with foreign languages and its readiness to coin new words out of old elements, English seems to have far more words in its core vocabulary than other languages.

For example, alongside *pig*, *swine* and *sow* (both from Old English) we find *boar* and *hog* (from Old English as well) and *pork* (from Latin via Old French). There are many such sets of words which add greatly to our opportunities to express subtle shades of meaning at various levels of style.

Look at the following examples:

- a ***pig*** breeder / a ***pig*** farmer
- ***pig*** breeding / ***pig*** farming
- "Influenza viruses that normally circulate in ***pigs*** are called 'variant' viruses when they are found in people" [source: www.cdc.gov]
- ***swine*** influenza
- "All ***sows*** were weaned and maintained in environmentally regulated facilities with ***boars*** housed in separate rooms, and/or a minimum of 40 feet away and downwind." [source: www.fda.gov]
- "Black bears and feral ***hogs*** can harbor *Trichinella* infection, and have been associated with confirmed cases and outbreaks of trichinellosis among hunters in the United States." [source: www.cdc.gov]
- "In this outbreak, 40 inhabitants of the village Ein-Kinya were infected after consuming raw ***pork*** from a wild boar" [source: www.cdc.gov]

- ✧ Judicious Use of Antimicrobials for ***Pork*** Producers" [source: www.fda.gov]

Sets of lexical units that have identical, or near identical, meanings are referred to as **synonyms.** Theoretically they can take each other's place in any context but in practice there are always differences.

EXAMPLE:
boar, hog, pork and swine: generally speaking, all refer to "any artiodactyl mammal of the African and Eurasian family *Suidae*, esp. *Sus scrofa* (domestic pig), typically having a long head with a movable snout, a thick bristle-covered skin, and, in wild species, long curved tusks".
Note how they differ in the contexts and the words they occur with (i.e. their **collocations**): a pig or a swine is "any of the animals in the genus *Sus*, within the *Suidae* family of even-toed ungulates"; a hog is the AmE of pig, and in BrE is "a male pig that has been castrated"; a boar is "an uncastrated male pig" (its opposite is a sow) and in the collocation "wild boar" stands for the Italian "cinghiale"; but when you use the item pork you are indicating "the flesh of pigs used as food" only!

It is usual to say that **synonyms share their denotation**, or central meaning, **while they differ in their connotations**, whether regional, social, stylistic or temporal aspects.

N.B. – the **denotation** of an expression is its context-independent, **objective** basic meaning, also called descriptive meaning, and contrasts with **connotation**, which is the variable, **subjective**, often emotive part of its meaning.

Please, refer to the "Handout 1 (Unit 1)" and reflect on the differences and the similarities of the GN *disease* and its many synonyms.

Using your Dictionary

Good dictionaries can tell you a lot more about a word than just its meaning, including (among other things):

- **synonyms** and their differences;
- **antonyms**: i.e. opposites;
- **collocations** or **word-clusters**: how words go together;
- **pronunciation**: this will mean learning some symbols which are different from the letters of the English alphabet;
- **word stress**;
- **usage**: how a word is used and any special grammatical pattern that goes with it;
- **word-class**: usual abbreviations are n = noun, v = verb, adj = adjective, adv = adverb; whether a noun is countable or uncountable, and whether a verb is normally transitive (needs an object) or intransitive (does not need an object).

N.B. – Remember that most words have **more than one meaning**!