POLYSEMY AND HOMONYMY IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE LOSS OF MEANING CONNECTIONS

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Abstract. This thesis examines polysemy as a linguistic phenomenon characterized by the coexistence of several semantically related lexical meanings within a single word. Particular attention is paid to distinguishing polysemy from homonymy, conversion, metaphor, metonymy, and adjectivization. Drawing on theoretical approaches to lexical semantics and examples from Uzbek, the study explores how semantic relationships develop and how the loss of intermediate meanings may lead to the formation of homonyms. The analysis highlights semantic relatedness as a fundamental criterion for identifying polysemous lexical units.

Keywords: polysemy, homonymy, lexical semantics, semantic shift, metaphor, metonymy, Uzbek language, meaning development.

Polysemy occupies an important position in lexical semantics because it demonstrates the capacity of a single lexical unit to express several related meanings. The development of these meanings reflects the dynamic nature of language and the influence of historical change, metaphorical associations, and communicative needs. However, polysemy is frequently confused with other linguistic phenomena, particularly homonymy and conversion. Distinguishing these concepts is essential for understanding the semantic structure of words in English and Uzbek.

The semantic structure of a polysemous word is determined by its lexical meanings and the relationships between them rather than simply by the number of definitions provided in a dictionary. As Apresjan (1974) emphasizes in his discussion of lexical semantics, the analysis of word meaning requires a systematic approach to the relationships among lexical units and their interpretations. Therefore, the identification of polysemy requires attention not only to individual meanings but also to their semantic connections.

One of the principal challenges in the study of polysemy is differentiating it from conversion. Polysemy involves the development or coexistence of several lexical meanings within one word, whereas conversion refers to a change in grammatical category without the addition of an affix. Although both processes may involve changes in the use of lexical units, they are not identical. A grammatical shift does not necessarily produce a new lexical meaning and, therefore, should not automatically be interpreted as polysemy.

A similar distinction can be observed between metaphor and adjectivization. Metaphor involves semantic transfer based on a perceived similarity between two entities, whereas adjectivization occurs when a noun performs an attributive function by expressing a characteristic of another noun.

Metaphorical extension, by contrast, may contribute directly to polysemy when a word acquires an additional lexical meaning through an association between different referents. The distinction lies in whether a new lexical meaning has developed or whether the original meaning simply performs a descriptive or grammatical function. This distinction is particularly important when examining languages in which nouns frequently express the characteristics of other entities.

Another relevant phenomenon is the relationship between polysemy and homonymy. Polysemy is characterized by semantic connections between the meanings of a single word, while homonymy involves lexical units whose meanings are no longer semantically related. Nevertheless, these

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categories may be connected historically. A polysemous word can develop into separate homonyms if the semantic relationships that originally linked its meanings gradually disappear.

In addition to referring to the closed hand, the word may denote a blow delivered with the fist. The second meaning develops through a relationship between the body part and the action performed with it. Since the figurative meaning remains directly associated with the primary meaning, both meanings form part of a single polysemous structure.

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