POLYSEMY AS A CENTRAL PHENOMENON OF LEXICAL SEMANTICS

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Abstract

This thesis examines polysemy as a central phenomenon of lexical semantics and its role in the development and organization of lexical meaning. Polysemy refers to the ability of a single lexeme to possess two or more related meanings. The study focuses on the processes through which lexical meanings emerge, develop, and expand through semantic extension, metaphorical transfer, and contextual reinterpretation. Particular attention is given to the distinction between polysemy and homonymy, where semantic relatedness serves as an important criterion. The thesis also considers synchronic and diachronic approaches to polysemy and highlights the role of lexical, grammatical, and extralinguistic context in determining the meaning activated in discourse. Polysemy demonstrates the flexibility, economy, and expressive potential of language and therefore remains an important area of linguistic research.

Keywords

polysemy, lexical semantics, monosemy, lexical meaning, homonymy, context.

Polysemy is one of the most significant phenomena in lexical semantics because it demonstrates the dynamic nature of lexical meaning. A polysemous lexeme can develop several semantically connected meanings and therefore can be used in different communicative contexts. The development of multiple meanings may result from semantic extension, metaphorical transfer, and contextual reinterpretation.

In linguistic studies, polysemy is generally understood as a phenomenon in which one lexeme has two or more meanings. An important characteristic of polysemy is the semantic relationship between these meanings. If the meanings associated with the same word form are not semantically connected, the linguistic item is generally treated as a case of homonymy rather than polysemy. Thus, semantic relatedness provides an important basis for distinguishing these two types of lexical ambiguity.

The analysis of polysemy can be conducted from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. A synchronic approach focuses on the meanings functioning within a particular stage of a language, whereas a diachronic approach examines how meanings develop and change over time. From this perspective, polysemy reflects the continuous development of the lexical system.

Context also plays an essential role in the interpretation of polysemous words. Lexical, grammatical, and extralinguistic contexts help speakers and listeners identify which particular meaning of a polysemous lexeme is activated in communication. Consequently, the same lexical item may express different meanings depending on its linguistic and communicative environment.

The study of polysemy is also closely connected with the relationship between vocabulary and grammar. As lexical meaning is not static, the development of vocabulary involves continuous processes of semantic change and expansion. Polysemy therefore contributes to linguistic economy by allowing speakers to express different related meanings through a single lexical form.

Conclusion

Polysemy occupies a central position in lexical semantics because it reflects the flexibility and semantic richness of language. The analysis of polysemous structures makes it possible to understand how lexical meanings develop, how context determines meaning, and how polysemy differs from

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homonymy. Further investigation of polysemy can contribute to a deeper understanding of semantic change and the organization of the lexical system.

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