

POLYSEMY IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

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Abstract: *The purpose of the article is to demonstrate the deep language features that predefine polysemy in English from a cognitive lens. Following a distinguished principle of cognitive linguistics, we consider the semantics of a word to be a two-level phenomenon, having the semantic (external) level and the conceptual (internal) level. In contrast to conventional research into polysemy within historical and lexical semantics, cognitive analyses do not focus on words but consider polysemy a cognitive organizing principle common to other domains of language: morphology, phonology, and syntax*

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of cognitive linguistics in the 1980s also brought a new approach to polysemy, which is by now well-known. In general, cognitive linguists emphasize the importance of meaning, conceptual processes, and embodied experience in the investigation of language, the human mind, and their interaction. Their emphasis on linguistic categorization, as well as its view that light shed on meaning is key to and drives linguistic structure, brought polysemy back again into center stage.

New theories of human categorization, based on prototypes and family resemblance, allowed for this new perspective. It was further found that a word with its network of polysemous senses can be seen as a category where senses of the word are connected to each other through general cognitive principles that include metaphor, metonymy, generalization, specification, and image schema transformations.[2;35]

Therefore, on the cognitive perspective, the core difference between polysemy and homonymy is the systematic relationship of meanings that take place in polysemy. Cognitive linguists accept that polysemous words mean related in a systematic and natural manner, forming radial categories where one or more senses are more prototypical (central) and others less prototypical (peripheral). It is assumed that the figurative meaning(s) of polysemous words are based metaphorically on the most prototypical spatial meanings. Scholars recognizing this phenomenon claim that metaphor has experientially based mappings between a notorious source domain and an abstract target domain.[4;56] In addition to this, unlike classical research dealing with polysemy from the perspective of historical and lexical semantics, cognitive approaches do not restrict their investigations to the semantic domain, and polysemy is treated as a cognitive organizing principle that is shared with different areas of language, including morphology, phonology, and syntax.

Next, we will have a look how different domains of language, namely lexicon, morphology, and syntax, force polysemy. With respect to word meaning, "run," which has

received quite a bit of attention from cognitive linguists, may serve as evidence for polysemy in the sense of lexical organization.[8;78]

Now think about the examples that illustrate different meanings of "run":

- a. The athlete runs fast (Yugurmoq - jismoniy harakat).
- b. The machine runs smoothly (Ishlamoq - apparat funksiyasi).
- c. She runs a business (Boshqarmoq - ish yuritish).
- d. The paint is running down the wall (Oqmoq - moddaning harakati).

As the cognitive linguists mentioned above argue, while every sense of "run" is unique, they all can be connected together; they all derive from the idea that not only physical objects can be transferred, but that abstract concepts like power can, and this gives rise to the CONTROL sense, which is licensed by the metaphor CONTROL IS.

Just as "run" is an example of polysemy, morphological categories exhibit polysemy, too. This can be demonstrated by the diminutives such as "children" and "little." Also, there are extensions to senses of affection and pejoration.[4;135]

As the above authors note, the meaning of "small" easily turns from endearment—that is, the affection we have for small children and small animals—and also to pejoration, since small can convey. [7;79] For instance, it is a very productive feature of both Hungarian and Italian, while there are limited forms of English's fewer diminutives, and they are far more constrained. While "streamlet" can be short for a small brook, "Landleet" is a small landle. The suffix indicates smallness, as in a "islet" is a small island, but the base "is" has no separate identifiable meaning. "piglet" is a term for a young pig. The suffix as well.

Think: "Bassinet" (a small bed for a very young baby that is able to be moved easily), "pipette" (a thin glass tube used especially in biology and chemistry for measuring or moving a small amount of liquid), "corvette" (a small warship designed for convoy escort duty), "lunette" (an arched aperture or window, especially one in a domed ceiling), "vignette" (a small illustration or portrait photograph which fades into its background without a definite border). Likewise, the suffix "-kin" denotes smallness as in "Lambkin" (a small or young lamb), but also to endearment such as in "Darlingkins" (an affectionate, playful term used to refer to someone you care about). The suffix "-ling" also means smallness (gosling, kitling, newborn and developing mean: "seedling" (a young plant), "nestling" (a young bird), "stripling" (a young person) and "yearling" (an animal is a young horse, deer, or other livestock, that is one year old). The suffix "-y/-ie" in ("teddy") refers both to small size and as used in baby talk, as in "Toyle," "Fishy," "Bunny," "Nanny," and "Hanky," etc. It is, however, being more productively used for nicknames which suggest endearment, like "Maggie," "Bobby," and "Katie," etc.

Attitudes of affection or pejoration are also an instance of etonymic/metaphoric transfer. A little size may elicit a small variety of diverse attitudes. Small things can be looked upon with love or loathing. In the same way lexical and morphological categories are polysemous, so do syntactic categories are.[7;18] Consider the ditransitive construction: SVOO, which has a range of abstract meanings associated with it as illustrated by the following examples:

1. Transfer of Possession meaning:
She gave him a book.

(This means transfer from one entity to another).

2. Benefactive/Recipient Meaning:

She cooked him a meal.

(Here, this action is done for the sake of the recipient).

3. Communication meaning:

She told him a story.

(It also means the transmission of data or ideas).

4. Causative Meaning:

She made him a cake.

(The act brings something into existence for someone).

5. Deprivation meaning:

And she had denied him that opportunity.

(That means that you deny something from a recipient or that you take something back).

6. Obligation/Imposition meaning:

She assigned him a task.

(It means placing a responsibility or a duty on the recipient).

Although the (intransitive) syntax associated with each of the abstract senses is distinct, the senses are clearly related to one another in that they all involve volitional transfer, even though the nature of that transfer varies from sense to sense. Cognitive linguists, both of whom, as I hope to have shown here, view polysemy as potentially revealing some significant essential parallels between lexical, morphological, and syntactic organization. It is common in recent scholarship to assume that polysemy is being manifest on the conceptual rather than purely linguistic level, i.e., that the patterns of linguistic polysemy reflect and reveal systematic differences and patterns in the organization and structure of linguistic units in the mind. The notion of polysemy is thereby extensionally applied to both the lexical and grammatical levels of language. Polysemy is said to control and systematize both lexis and grammar and can be regarded as one of the parameters organizing the language system. Hence, polysemy is a fundamental property of human language.

Conclusion. This article demonstrates the centrality of polysemy in understanding language from a cognitive linguistics perspective. By exploring the concept through the dual lens of external semantic and internal conceptual levels, it highlights how polysemy is not merely a feature of individual words, but a pervasive cognitive organizing principle that extends across various domains of language, including the lexicon, morphology, and syntax. Cognitive linguistics redefines polysemy as a systematic and interconnected network of meanings, where diverse senses of a word are conceptually related, often through metaphorical and metonymic processes. Through examples like the polysemy of "run" in lexical organization, diminutives in morphology, and the syntactic versatility of ditransitive constructions, the article shows how polysemy reflects deeper cognitive mechanisms that shape both word meanings and grammatical structures. This approach underscores the idea that polysemy is not a linguistic anomaly, but a fundamental aspect of human language that governs how meanings are categorized, structured, and processed. Ultimately,

polysemy is shown to be integral not only to lexical development but also to the broader organization of language, confirming its status as a key organizing principle in both linguistic and cognitive frameworks.

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